

THE ENHANCED RESIDENTIAL PLAN

Submitted by the Residential Life Committee

Middlebury College

May 1998

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INTRODUCTION

History and Context

In September of 1997, the Board of Trustees resolved that the Middlebury College community “design and implement” a Commons system that includes three cornerstones: 1) decentralized dining 2) proximate housing for a Faculty Associate 3) continuing membership for students. The Board left it to the community to clarify the meaning of “decentralized,” “proximate,” and “continuing.”

The Board’s resolutions grew out of a decade-long effort to enhance the relation between intellectual and residential life at Middlebury. In 1989 the Task Force on Student Social Life recommended the abolition of the fraternity system and advocated a system of dormitory clusters or “commons” that would integrate various aspects of student life. Two years later, the Commons were established along with a revised residential system that included co-educational social houses and academic interest houses. In the report that defined the program, the Residential Life Committee stressed that “wherever possible, the cultural and social life of the College should be organized so as to take advantage of the new residential and governmental units.” The 1995-96 Task Force on General Excellence in the Liberal Arts, a committee appointed by the president, restated these goals and offered specific proposals to “eliminate the distinction between residential life and what happens in the classroom.” The “Retrospective Review of the Middlebury College Commons System (1992-1997),” completed in May of 1997, reaffirmed the goals of the Commons. The Review noted the system’s weaknesses--lack of physical infrastructure, low levels of participation, and lack of continuing membership--and concluded that its potential importance would not be realized unless the College moved beyond the status quo. Looking ahead to how the system could be improved, the Review recommended “a Commons model that maintains a central dining hall, but decentralizes some of the functions of a student center.” The Review also included several other models, one of which was a fully decentralized Commons system. It was this last model that President McCardell had in mind when he presented his vision of a fully articulated Commons to the Board of Trustees, whose subsequent resolutions have led to this document.

Charged with the task of drafting a residential plan, the Residential Life Committee acknowledges that the College’s year-long discussion of this initiative has been energetic and sometimes contentious. Students in particular have been upset by the prospect of changing the school they know and love. Yet the initiative has brought together people from all sectors of the community for a sustained conversation about the nature of residential life and the future of Middlebury College.

The Committee has carefully followed these discussions. We have reviewed the materials sent to us by the Residential Life Steering Committee, examined the documents posted on the Web, and listened to the voices of the community on this initiative. We have responded by including programmatic options that reflect a range of opinions about how residential life at Middlebury should be improved. Besides reflecting community sentiment, however, the planning draft also includes the Committee’s own sense of these

options. Where we have strongly agreed on a particular option, we have underscored our support; where we have disagreed, we have included minority and majority perspectives. The result is the Committee's own vision of residential life at the College, a plan that we hope is both a responsible conclusion to this year's discussions and a reaffirmation of the qualities that make Middlebury a special place.

Why Fix It . . . ?

Our challenge this year has been to transform a system often described as excellent. For many students, Middlebury already offers a first-rate liberal arts education in a beautiful rural setting. We believe that the residential experience is a crucial part of this education. Members of the Middlebury community would agree that residential life should: foster an inclusive environment that supports diversity; encourage meaningful relations (and dialogue) between faculty, students and staff; create an atmosphere optimal for student learning and success; promote student ownership of residential and social life; and provide opportunities for student leadership, self-governance, and accountability. The residential college should be a place where students feel at home, a place where they know and are known by others, a place where they participate, lead, and are challenged intellectually and socially.

Our residential mission statement is a story we tell ourselves about ourselves; it underscores the ideals that we honor in theory and struggle to practice. To create the kind of community where these goals can be realized on a daily basis, we must look hard at ourselves and at the structures that enable--and limit--the choices we make. We must examine how residential life on this campus really works--and doesn't work.

Throughout this year, we have searched for ways to talk about the residential initiative. In general, our discussion of the plan has developed along two different planes. The first--call it "the high road"--was signaled by President McCardell's 1997 May speech to the Trustees. The high road begins with the assumption that Middlebury is one of the finest liberal arts colleges in the nation, but that to meet the expectations of future students it must build upon its academic excellence and provide a comprehensive, seamless education. This goal is best accomplished by developing more intimately scaled communities within the College and by closing the gap between academic and residential spheres. The "low road" discussion relies on a more negative characterization of residential life at the College. It focuses on the chronic problems in student life: lack of respect for people and property, substance abuse, and inhospitable living conditions for minority students. It looks to the enhanced residential plan for solutions to these problems.

Although these two discussion threads do not account for everything that has been said about the enhanced residential plan, their presence has skewed the conversation and given our deliberations a paradoxical quality: How can residential life at Middlebury be both excellent and seriously flawed? Without taking the middle road between these positions and compromising the perspectives of each, we claim that both characterizations are true. Despite the many good things that happen on this campus, the Middlebury experience is

not uniformly excellent. The SGA's passage of the Agreement to Respect Community, tensions surrounding racial and sexual identity, almost \$60,000 a year in dorm damage, and the breakdowns in civility that the Dean of Students Office handles on a weekly basis are proof enough that our residential culture is in need of enhancement.

We believe that the residential plan described below will not only make this excellent college even better, but that it will enhance our ability to improve human relations on this campus. We believe that by decentralizing some of our most important administrative functions--with Deans and Faculty Associates working together in the Commons to support students--the new system offers more efficient lines of communication and better mechanisms for knowing when we succeed and when we need to apply ourselves more diligently to complex problems. In a truly enhanced residential system, the Dean and the Associate should know all Commons members on an individual basis. In this system, many of the problems we now confront in residential life--from dorm damage to personal crises--should ideally be prevented as faculty, staff, and students work together to identify and address ongoing concerns. We hope, and indeed the Middlebury community as a whole should expect, that the structural changes proposed in this plan will enable us to make significant qualitative improvements in residential life.

In this year's discussions of how our community works, we have often talked past each other and revealed the gaps in understanding that separate faculty from students, staff from faculty, students from staff, and students from other students. Our greatest need and challenge is to close these gaps without sacrificing the diversity and pluralism that are vital to our educational mission. Meeting this challenge requires imagination and a willingness to act on our ideals.

THE CORNERSTONES

Decentralized Dining

Concept

Dining is an experience that brings people together. Besides allowing for the efficient delivery of good food in pleasant surroundings, our dining halls should be places where all members of Middlebury College feel comfortable. Our facilities should encourage relaxed dining and meaningful conversation. They should be cultural hubs, where students, faculty, and staff can eat as part of a community that is a distinct component of the larger Middlebury College community.

Options

1) Fully decentralized. A dining hall for every Commons, each located within the Commons cluster. Decentralized dining halls would give each Commons its own space for programming events, thus providing a critical environment for building community.

2) Status quo with improvements. Our dining system is already decentralized. We should expand Proctor and renovate existing facilities so they can more comfortably accommodate our student population.

Note: Both options assume that students will be free to eat wherever they want.

Discussion

The faculty supports decentralized dining because they see Commons dining as enabling the creation of smaller-scaled communities and providing better opportunities for meeting with students and colleagues. In general, students are opposed to fully decentralized dining because they feel that smaller dining units will disconnect students from the whole of Middlebury and deprive them of the expansive social experience they now enjoy in Proctor. In particular, minority students do not support Commons-based dining because they fear that decentralization will diminish their opportunities for seeing other minority students. It should also be noted that the cost of building new dining facilities concerns many members of the community.

Recommendations

Majority Position

A majority of this committee is convinced that fully decentralized dining is crucial to the success of the Commons system and therefore endorses **Option 1**. We believe that decentralized dining will foster intimate, small-scaled dining experiences and help build community within the Commons. We are also persuaded that the dining halls will give each Commons a significant amount of social space that can be used for purposes other than dining. Physically and symbolically, these dining halls should serve as focal points of Commons life. The Committee supports the Student Steering Committee's recommendation that dining halls vary in size and design. The Committee also recognizes that many students feel an important part of student life will be lost when Proctor is renovated, but believes that this expansive social experience can be found elsewhere and therefore recommends the creation of a strong Student Center.

Minority Position

A minority of the committee feels that campus dining could be dramatically improved without creating a Commons-based decentralized dining system and therefore supports **Option 2**. Middlebury's current decentralized dining system offers students a variety of atmospheres and food choices, something that would be lost in a Commons based system. We think that the dining atmosphere needs to be improved through a renovation and expansion of facilities (in particular, Proctor Dining Hall) so that a greater number of students can be served at one time and students, faculty and staff do not feel "uncomfortably crammed into a dining hall." We strongly believe that Proctor serves as the place of large-scale social interaction at Middlebury, and that without such a large dining environment students might lose a sense of Middlebury College as a whole and might be more likely to feel isolated in their Commons.

Faculty Proximity

Concept

This cornerstone is based on the idea that by living proximate to the residence halls, Faculty Associates will enhance the quality of residential life. The location of the Associate's house figures strongly in the Associate's job description and the potential positive influence he or she can have on our students' lives. Physical proximity and architectural design matter since they shape how faculty and staff affiliates will interact with students; determine the nature of the space the Associate has at his or her disposal for hosting intellectual events and entertaining; help define how he or she will work with the Dean and the Residential Life staff; and generally affect the atmosphere of the Commons community. Although infrastructure alone cannot determine human relations, proximate housing will create daily opportunities for spontaneous, natural exchanges between faculty and students. In promoting these exchanges and by encouraging students in all their endeavors at Middlebury--in classrooms and labs, on stages and playing fields--Associates can begin to establish the mutual respect and trust that are so important in residential life.

Since one of our tasks this year has been to define proximity, the community has talked at length about the meaning of faculty presence in residential life. In general, the campus agrees that:

- Proximity does not mean that Associates will live in the residence halls.
- Proximity does not mean *in loco parentis*. Associates will be on hand to advise and support students, not to serve as surrogate parents or disciplinarians.
- The Associate will normally be a tenured member of the academic faculty. However, the outstanding work that staff members have accomplished as Associates in the current Commons system suggests that in making appointments the President should depart from "normally" as he or she sees fit.
- The Associate's primary responsibility will be to establish a student-centered, supportive atmosphere in the Commons that encourages mutual respect, individual responsibility, and ongoing learning. These broad educational responsibilities include, but are not limited to, highlighting the importance of intellectual and artistic endeavor.
- The Associate will work collaboratively with the Commons Dean to support and advise students in the Commons. One of the greatest potential improvements this residential system offers is the enhanced student support that will grow out of the Dean and the Associate's daily interactions with students, and with each other. By identifying student problems as they develop and by praising students when they have succeeded, the Dean and Associate will be able to provide wide-ranging, local support. In many ways, the Dean and Associate's working relationship symbolizes the integration of student life and academic affairs that the residential plan is meant to achieve.
- The Associate will build an intergenerational community within the Commons by inviting faculty, staff, and townspeople to serve as affiliates and providing opportunities (at meals and other events) for them to share in the life of the Commons. In this way, the Commons will foster collegiality among faculty members, enabling intellectual and social exchange beyond disciplinary or departmental

boundaries. Likewise staff members who affiliate with a Commons will have the opportunity to make connections with students, faculty and other staff members in ways that extend beyond their daily work. Faculty and staff already have access to the academic and cultural resources available through the Commons, yet the enhanced system promises additional benefits: regular meals with students and colleagues, access to curricular and social space, and the sense of belonging to a diverse, small-scale community within the larger College.

Options

- 1) Associates' houses will be located on the periphery of campus, as they are now
- 2) Associates' houses will be located on the periphery of the Commons. The houses will be "visible" from the residence halls and allow privacy for both students and the Associate.
- 3) Proximate housing will not be required of Associates.

Discussion

Feedback from the college community has made it clear that there is no support for faculty residences within the dormitories. In general, the faculty has expressed concern that proximate housing for Associates may cost too much and disrupt the architectural integrity of the campus; so long as Associates have control over a relatively large social space within the Commons proper, they need not live on campus. The Commons Associates, on the other hand, unanimously support the idea of "visible" proximate housing, located on the periphery of the Commons. The Student Steering Committee, which was responsible for developing the notion of visibility, likewise recommends that Associates' houses be located on the edge of the Commons. Although the role of a decentralized Dean has not generated a lot of attention in campus-wide discussions, this position is crucial to the proper running of the Commons, and has been thoroughly detailed in a report written by the Student Affairs Division (and included in the Appendix).

Recommendation

The Residential Life Committee unanimously endorses **Option 2**. We believe that locating visible Associate houses on the periphery of the Commons is the option that most effectively supports the goals of the enhanced residential plan. This model ensures that the geography of buildings in each individual commons will be taken into consideration before selecting or designing an Associate residence. And it establishes the distance we think is necessary for the Associate to guide and support life in the Commons. If we can establish communities that allow faculty and students to meet each other on common ground we can begin to effect what the Task Force on General Excellence called "a radical change in the nature of student-faculty relationships."

If this definition of "proximity" does not work in practice, then we assume that the Associates' residences may be used for senior housing, guest rooms, academic purposes, or as the kind of "swing space" we often lack when we undertake campus renovations.

Following the Faculty's proposal, and in order to promote intellectual life in the Commons, we suggest that residential units include a mix of classrooms, study space, faculty offices, and conference rooms for students and faculty.

As noted above, the Associate will work in partnership with Dean, providing support and assistance when needed to the Student Affairs personnel assigned to that Commons. The Dean will be a student affairs professional and serve as the chief operating officer of the Commons. The Dean and his or her staff will provide many of the support services currently provided by our Dean of Students Office, but on a smaller, more personal scale. Comprehensive and detailed, the "Student Affairs Division Response to The Commons Vision Statement" explains how the Commons might function as a working organization, and is an important starting point for mapping out the network of relations that will characterize residence in the Commons and give students, faculty, and staff a shared sense of identity. We recommend that this document guide the decentralization of the Deans in order to create effective partnerships with Faculty Associates in each Commons.

Continuing Membership

Concept

Residency in a Commons for more than one year fosters the sense of belonging that is so important to a healthy community. Continuing residency confers more than the benefits of membership, as in an organization or a club. It suggests a long-term connection to a place and the people who live in it--a neighborhood or a home. Continuing residence in a Commons encourages students to feel ownership of their residence halls and to develop a sense of tradition, responsibility and accountability that is often missing in our current residential system. It would increase opportunities for long-term student leadership and student governance, giving students personal responsibility for the character and quality of their daily lives at the College.

Consensus on Continuing Membership:

Members of the Middlebury community generally agree with the following:

- Continuing Residency must allow for and support the needs of all students, including minority students, within each Commons and the residential system as a whole;
- First-year students should be assigned randomly to a Commons after admission to Middlebury in order to ensure diversity within each Common;
- First-year students should be housed in clusters of 100 - 125 within each Commons, clusters large enough to establish class identity within a Commons and to create a support network for new students;
- Each Commons should have students from all four classes living within it, as older students are important role models and will provide experienced leadership for the Commons;
- The College should continue and strengthen the junior counselor program;
- Each Commons must offer a variety of high-quality housing options in order to accommodate successfully students from all four classes for multiple years within a Commons;
- Commons spaces should be designed to create community. Ross Commons may not be the benchmark for these spaces, as the suites sometimes isolate room groups from one another and work against the goal of building community. As we move forward, we should consider selective renovations to Ross;
- Residency in the sophomore year should be required to give each Commons the benefits of continuity, including a stronger, more stable community, well-established traditions, and a deeper commitment from students to their Commons;
- In special cases, students should also be allowed to transfer from one Commons to another;
- Students will maintain Commons affiliation for all four years, whether or not they live in the Commons.

Options

1. Required residency in Commons for four years.
2. Required residency in first and second year. Students may live in academic interest or social houses in the junior and senior years.

3. Required residency in first year and second year. Students may live in academic interest houses beginning in their third semester and in social houses in their fourth semester.
4. No residency requirements. Expectation of voluntary continuing residency for sophomores, juniors and seniors who do not draw into academic interest and/or social houses.

Discussion

Community discussion of this cornerstone has brought many important issues to light, including minority students' need for better support, the necessity of improving the housing stock on campus, students' desire for options and variety within residential life, and controversy about selectivity in the house system. Two groups in particular have offered substantive recommendations on the cornerstone: faculty and the Student Steering Committee.

Faculty discussions yielded the principle that "an enhanced Commons system, founded on inclusiveness, and devoted to integrating educational activity and mature community living, should be the *central element* of Middlebury's entire residential program." Calling for the replacement of the current four-part residential system with an "integrated Commons-focused plan," their document asks that all residential units have "inclusive membership practices and a primary educational focus" and that all residence halls relate specifically and constructively to the Commons, including the Ridgeline houses.

The Student Steering Committee Report recognizes the potential of the continuing membership concept, but asserts that its benefits must be so obvious that "students will *want* to continue residence in their Commons for all four years"; hence, residency requirements should not be necessary. The SSC also stressed the "precautionary assumption" that all housing on campus must be "equalized" prior to implementing a policy of continuing membership. And it developed specific structural proposals, many of which will appear as recommendations in its appended report.

Recommendation

We recommend that **Option 3**, or the principles generally agreed upon by the community, serve as guiding principles in implementing this cornerstone. The Residential Life Committee strongly agrees with the faculty position that the Commons System should be the central plan for residential life and that other residential entities should be connected to it.

Equity in housing is crucial to the plan's success; we recommend that renovations and construction be planned in order to give each Commons an attractive mix of housing options designed to meet the needs of all four classes. Renovations and construction should take into account the goals of community and allow each Commons to have unique features and own character.

Commons must be inclusive, and support the institutional value of diversity in specific ways. All Commons staff should be trained to be responsive to the unique needs of minority students on this campus. With a personal knowledge of each student, the

Associate, the Dean, and the Residential Life Staff should be better able to address developmental problems and cultural differences that are inevitable in a diverse student population. In order to support the first-year experience and underscore the importance of communal living, freshmen should ordinarily have roommates; February entrants should likewise live with fellow Febs and, whenever possible, be housed within clusters of other first-years students. In addition, each Commons would be well served by minority affairs liaisons—probably students—who raise awareness of diversity issues and work to increase tolerance, respect, and understanding.

In order to ensure diversity among the student population, all students should be assigned to a Commons after admission; they should retain their affiliation for all four years. Students should be required to live in their Commons for the first two years, although exceptions may be made for sophomores who choose to live in academic interest and social houses. Juniors and seniors should be encouraged to continue their Commons residency so that, over the long-term development of the new system, seniors take pride in their Commons and look forward to completing their Middlebury career there. Each Commons should take the initiative to introduce and welcome students into Commons life early—even before orientation—and should foster that relationship with Commons after graduation.

There should be substantial opportunities for student governance in each Commons. The SGA should be restructured around Commons-based representation. Student leaders should be able to create and uphold meaningful traditions. Although the 1991 Residential Life Report urged the establishment of Commons councils that would govern the residential halls and direct Commons life, the councils now function almost exclusively as programming boards. The trips to other campuses, especially Rice University, revealed that decentralized residential systems can create many significant opportunities for student leadership. A primary goal of the enhanced residential plan, then, is to give students more hands-on, local governance of residential life. Students should also be encouraged to take initiatives that establish identities and instill Commons traditions. Such initiatives might include Commons photographs, student artwork, or an awards/trophy case. Middlebury should encourage class identity within Commons and across Commons.

The Office of Residential Life should begin to redesign room draw to give priority to Commons, and to develop how individual room draws within each Commons should work. Senior houses should be assigned to each Commons with priority given to Commons residents. Commons-based housing should be as flexible as possible to accommodate a variety of needs. Transfer to another Commons should be possible. Students wishing to change rooms should be encouraged to do so within Commons before seeking transfer to another Commons.

THE HOUSE SYSTEM

Academic interest houses

Concept

Residential houses organized around academic interests provide unique opportunities for students to continue learning outside the classroom. Middlebury College is home to five language houses (French, Italian, Spanish, German, Chinese) and two residential learning centers — the PALANA Multi-cultural Center and the Weybridge Environmental Center. The language houses offer students the opportunity to live in an environment where a foreign language is the primary language spoken. The residential learning centers offer students a chance to organize their residential lives around significant intellectual and cultural interests like multiculturalism and environmentalism. All seven of the academic interest houses enhance life at Middlebury by hosting cultural, educational and social events which are open to the entire campus.

Options

- 1) All academic interest houses, including language houses and learning centers, will be residential and each house will actively affiliate with a specific Commons. This affiliation should lead to collaborative programming — for instance, co-sponsored events and shared use of Commons and House space. While as organizations, houses will be affiliated with a particular Commons, residents of academic interest houses will be drawn from all Commons, and individual residents of academic interest houses will continue to be members of the Commons in which they lived prior to joining the academic interest house. This means that individual residents will maintain their relationships with their Commons Deans and Commons Associates, even if their house has a co-sponsoring affiliation with a different Commons.
- 2) Academic interest houses will be residential, without formal ties to a specific Commons. Residents will be drawn from across the campus, and individuals will maintain their original Commons affiliation as well as their relationship with the Dean and the Associate.
- 3) All academic interest houses will be non-residential learning communities.
- 4) Foreign language houses will be residential; all other academic interest houses (PALANA, Weybridge House) will be non-residential learning communities.

Note: Options 1, 2, and 4 assume that students will be eligible to live in an academic interest house at the beginning of their sophomore year; the normal term of residency will be a year.

Discussion

In general, the community has expressed strong support for the academic interest houses. Many people have pointed out that by providing a residential setting for intellectual development, the academic interest houses already accomplish what the enhanced Commons system seeks to achieve. Others questioned the educational focus of special

interest houses like PALANA and Weybridge as they are not linked directly to the curriculum and — citing the proven success of “total immersion” programs at the Summer Language Schools — argued that in the enhanced residential system only the foreign language houses should remain residential.

As a whole, the Faculty urges that residential academic interest houses (as presently constituted) “be encouraged” within the Commons system and proposes that each house be attached to a particular Commons, with members being drawn from all Commons. The Foreign Language Division has given its support to this arrangement, emphasizing the academic/cultural contributions that language houses could bring to the Commons. The Student Steering Committee, on the other hand, recommends that the academic interest houses operate independently from the Commons, without being attached to a particular Commons; residents would retain their original Commons affiliation. All groups maintain that students should be eligible to live in academic interest houses beginning in their sophomore year.

Recommendations

Majority Position

The Committee believes that residential academic interest houses have an important role to play in the enhanced Commons system. We endorse the Faculty’s recommendation that each academic interest house be attached to a specific Commons, and that membership be drawn from all Commons (**Option 1**). We do not differentiate between language houses and the environmental and multi-cultural centers. We expect that the academic interest houses will each work closely with their Commons to develop intellectual and cultural programs/events that will benefit both the particular house and the Commons and the campus as a whole (for suggestions on how such programming might work, see the Foreign Language Division’s proposal in the Appendix). However, we reaffirm the conclusions established by the 1991 Report of the Residential Life Committee regarding academic interests houses, which recommend limiting the number of residential academic interest houses. We would like to underscore that qualification, especially in light of the Faculty’s determination that “all residential units will relate specifically and constructively to the Commons.” Thus we recommend that the Residential Life Committee, or its successor in the new system, establish clear guidelines for determining the appropriate number of residential academic interest houses and that the College not approve new academic interest houses until this is determined.

Minority Position I

Academic interest houses should not be formally affiliated with a specific Commons, but rather should exist autonomously (**Option 2**). Students living in academic interest houses would maintain their affiliations with their original Commons.

Minority Position II

Academic interest houses should be non-residential (**Option 3**). We endorse the principle of inclusiveness and believe that if we permit some students to live outside their Commons cluster we may not create pluralistic residential communities. We support the “living and learning” that now takes place in the academic interest houses, but believe that non-residential learning centers—like Chellis House—would be the most effective

structures for supporting specialized intellectual and cultural interests. Foreign language speakers could be incorporated in residence hall blocks. Regardless of what decisions are made for the immediate future, we urge the College to phase out residential academic interest houses over the long term.

Minority Position III

Foreign languages houses should be residential, while learning centers, such as PALANA and Weybridge House, should become non-residential (**Option 4**). We would like to underscore the distinctive academic role played by foreign language houses and believe that the houses should exist autonomously of the Commons and that the College should offer a language house for each language taught at Middlebury. We believe that the Chellis House offers a good example of the benefits of a centrally-located educational center with an institutional scope. Well-located, easily-accessible centers for multicultural affairs and environmental issues would benefit all students and demonstrate strong commitment from the institution to these topics. Ideally, such intellectual centers would be places frequented by not only students, but also faculty and staff.

Social Houses

Concept

The Trustees accepted a minority opinion in the 1989 Report of the Task Force on Student Social Life recommending that the fraternities evolve into co-educational Social Houses. Today we have five active social houses. Social houses provide enhanced social experiences, increased leadership opportunities, and diverse housing options to the 13% of our student body who are members. Social Houses use a selective membership process, but any student who participates fully in the "rush" program is guaranteed a place in a social house. As social centers, the houses draw together students from all four classes, yet they also reach out to the Middlebury environs through community service projects.

Options

1) Social houses will continue to be residential houses, providing beds and social space for their members, who will be drawn from all Commons. Each house will actively affiliate with a specific Commons. This affiliation should lead to collaborative programming — for instance, co-sponsored events and shared use of Commons and House space. Individual residents of social houses will continue to be members of the Commons in which they lived prior to joining a social house. This means that individuals will continue their relationships with their Commons Deans and Commons Associates, even if their house has a co-sponsoring affiliation with a different Commons.

2) Social houses will continue to be residential houses, providing beds and social space for their members who will be drawn from all Commons. As they are today, social houses will remain independent organizations without formal ties to any Commons. Individual residents of social houses will continue to be members of the Commons in which they lived prior to joining a social house. This means that individuals will continue their relationships with their Commons Deans and Commons Associates.

3) Social houses will become non-residential campus organizations.

Note: Options 1 and 2 assume that social houses members will be eligible for residency in the spring of their sophomore year. Normal residency will be a year.

Discussion

The discussion on how the social houses will or will not relate to the enhanced Commons System has been intense and, at times, dramatic. Faculty have maintained that all residential units must relate to the Commons and have "inclusive membership practices and a primary educational focus." In this model, all residential spaces must be supportive of the mission and goals of the Commons. As such, social houses without a primary educational focus would be discontinued. The Student Steering Committee Subcommittee on Social Houses asserts that with an enhanced educational and community-service role, the houses will complement the mission of the Commons and serve as centers for the development of inter-Commons relationships. Their proposal "fully endorses improving academic connections in the tradition of a true liberal arts .

education” and suggests structures and programs to link social houses with the academic mission of the College.

Recommendations

Majority Position

A majority of the committee supports **Option 1**. We support many of the proposals made in the Student Steering Committee Subcommittee on Social Houses, and especially welcome the social houses’ willingness to engage in significant reform. We believe that both the Commons system and the social houses will benefit from the formal affiliation described above. We expect that relationships between the social houses and Commons will evolve through the collaborative work of both Commons and house leaders; we assume that the Associate and the Dean will play a role in this work. We urge the Residential Life Committee, or its successor in the new system, to guide these efforts. We further recommend that an ad hoc committee comprised of students, faculty, and staff examine the Commons/social house relationship and evaluate membership practices within the social houses. We believe this evaluation should take place in the spring of 2001, regardless of when or whether the enhanced plan is implemented.

Minority Position

Social houses will not affiliate formally with the Commons and will exist as organizations separate from the Commons. As individuals, social house members will maintain their original Commons affiliations including their relationship with the Dean and Associate if they live in a social house (**Option 2**). Commons allegiance will not be changed by social house membership. Social houses and Commons will continue to expand their interaction through shared membership and shared events using the houses’ social spaces. Those who hold the minority position believe that affiliating houses with Commons would entangle alliances—e. g. “My social house is connected to Cook Commons, but I live in Wonnacott Commons”—weaken Commons ties, and create a confusing residential system.

STUDENT CENTER

Our committee, as well as the community as a whole, supports the concept of a stronger, more vibrant Student Center. As the College moves toward Commons-based living and dining, a central Student Center will provide the inter-Commons experience now found at Proctor. The Student Center will serve as the hub for all centralized student activities and as a daily gathering place for students, faculty, and staff. With the inclusion of adequate spaces for college-wide organizations, comfortable social space, dining options (like the Grille), and other central services, the Student Center will function as an inviting location for cross-campus activities and interactions. The report completed by the Student Affairs Division (included in the Appendix) provides an important starting point for implementing this plan.

THE NEW RESIDENTIAL SYSTEM

The fully articulated Commons is a system with three components: decentralized dining, faculty presence, and continuing membership. While each piece of the plan makes a distinct contribution to the larger goal of creating vibrant intellectual communities, it is in working together that the system’s pieces will yield their greatest benefits. Decentralized dining without continuing membership, for instance, adds convenience to housing-based communities but lacks the traditions and shared experiences that the entire proposal seeks to attain through continuing membership. Faculty presence without the components of continuing membership and decentralized dining places faculty in students’ lives without offering the benefits of continuity and experience in a shared community space. In short, the three cornerstones are the foundation of a residential plan that works as a system. Together, they hold the promise of collegiate life intentionally scaled and designed to foster the meaningful relationships that enable undergraduate success on all levels. It is critical to the success of the Commons plan that the community understands the benefits of implementing all of the cornerstones together.

It is just as critical that we begin to assess the larger ramifications of moving ahead with the enhanced residential system. As many people have noted this year, we need to talk about how much this plan will cost to build and to operate. We need to discuss the new construction and renovations the plan will require, and how our existing architecture—and a beautiful campus—can accommodate more building. We need to consider whether the proposed changes will require administrative and bureaucratic transformations that this plan has not envisioned. We need to assess our current information technology systems and determine whether they can adequately serve a decentralized residential program, especially with regard to storing and accessing student records. Finally, we need to continue our conversation about how the initiative will affect the people who live and work at the College—students, faculty, and staff.

This year’s dialogue has revealed anxiety about a change that would reorganize the way we know each other and our expectations of college life, even as it has exposed weaknesses in our current organization. We believe that the enhanced residential plan.

truly can “make Middlebury more like itself”--even as it allows us to make life here significantly better.

In summary, the Residential Life Committee makes the following recommendations:

- A dining hall for each Commons, taking advantage of existing resources whenever possible;
- Proximate housing for a Faculty Associate located on the periphery of each Commons and visible from the residence halls;
- Continuing membership in a Commons for all students with exceptions made for students who elect to live in academic interest houses or social houses. The system should be flexible enough for students to change rooms or Commons.
- Academic interest houses will be residential, and each one will be affiliated with a particular Commons.
- Social houses will continue to provide residency options for members, and each house will be affiliated with a particular Commons. Social houses will evolve as campus organizations with a significant educational focus.
- The College should create a strong Student Center as early in the renovation and construction process as possible.
- The College should begin immediately to explore ways to improve intellectual, social and residential life for today's students.
- As the College looks to the future and begins renovation and construction, it should establish a process for periodically evaluating the success of the enhanced Commons system, adapting plans as necessary to ensure the best residential system.

WHAT WE WILL DO NOW

Many creative ideas have emerged from this year's discussion. The Residential Life Committee believes that significant steps can be taken to improve life on campus. We include the following ideas, which have been generated by the community, and recommend that the College explore their implementation in the short term.

- Connect First-Year Seminars with Commons. The Residential Life Committee believes that the Office of Residential Life, the Commons Associates, and the Director of the First-Year Seminar program should work together to develop an implementation plan.
- Create a team for each Commons, composed of Associate, Dean, Commons Residential Adviser and Student Leaders so that Middlebury can begin to develop a strong support network for Commons life.
- Build stronger Commons identities through Commons signs on residence halls, Commons colors, banners, intramural teams, pictures, publicity hubs, Web sites, etc.
- Strengthen administrative support for Commons Associates, Deans, Residential Advisers and Student Council leaders.
- Expand funding for current Commons programming and capital improvements.
- Offer Commons-focused Orientations for student leaders and new students.
- Create academic roles for Commons Residential Advisers, such as tutoring and administering course warnings.
- Begin to address diversity at all levels of the institution, through hiring, peer mentor programs (i.e. Minority Affairs Advisors), training for faculty, staff and students. As the Human Relations Committee convened by President McCardell examines diversity problems on this campus, it should pay special attention to residential life. Any centralized institutional response to these problems must take into account the development of the decentralized Commons system. So, for instance, if a Diversity Affairs Office were established it would work closely with Commons Deans and RHAs.
- Dissolve Community Council and the Residential Life Committee and establish a new committee so that community policy decisions can be made in the context of the enhanced residential system. A model for this kind of reform is the Educational Affairs Committee, which recently took the place of the now defunct Educational Council and Teaching Resources Committee. As we restructure our residential system, we will also have to rethink our mechanisms for oversight.
- Encourage SGA and Residential Life Staff to work together to establish a Commons-based judicial system.
- Faculty Council and Staff Council, in conjunction with the Residential Life Committee, assemble a list of opportunities for employee participation in Commons activities and College events. Example: Faculty -- attend two out of five receptions for students and parents (2 Parents' Weekends, February graduation, May graduation faculty reception.) This alone would increase faculty participation from less than 10 at some functions to up to over 100.
- Encourage Faculty Council to adopt a policy whereby each faculty member not teaching a Winter Term course would be invited to offer a discussion group/workshop

through the current Student Activities Workshop series. Workshops similar to current offerings, book discussion groups, or discussions on specific topics of interest might be offered in a weekly gathering.

- Encourage Staff Council to adopt a policy whereby every staff member can voluntarily choose an athletic team, student club, or other student activity (dramatic production, musical group) to support by attendance at games, productions or concerts. Staff would be encouraged to make themselves known to the students, and the student organization would be encouraged to recognize the support of the staff. For staff members who have special interests and the desire to share them with students, Winter Term Workshop offering should be encouraged.
- Take-A-Faculty/Staff-to-Lunch Program: Encourage students to invite faculty and staff to lunch. Create a list of topics of interest to faculty and staff members, with that employee's name and department, so that students might ask someone to lunch specific topics of discussion in mind. For example, traveling in France, architecture in the town of Middlebury, making maple syrup, making maple syrup, investing in the market.
- Provide funding for faculty to host dinners at their homes for students in their classes.
- Renovate and build residence halls using the basic principles outlined in the discussion of the Continuing Commons cornerstone. Take care of buildings in poor condition first: Stewart, Allen and Battell.
- Build a student center.
- Define alliances between the academic interest houses and social houses.
- Begin to decentralize the Dean of Students Office by assigning Deans to Commons and asking them to organize their work that way as much as possible.
- Expand the Continuing Commons Room Draw options so as to attract more continuing members.
- Begin restructuring Room Draw by Commons, including affiliating small senior houses with Commons.

APPENDICES

The documents listed below and included in the forthcoming pages represent a partial history of this year's discussion of residential life.

- **Board Resolutions**
- **Process for campus-wide discussion**
- **Residential Life Steering Committee Timeline**
- **Student Affairs Division Response to the Commons Vision**
- **Student Steering Committee Recommendations**
- **Faculty Principles and Proposals**
- **Language Division Plan for Academic Interest Houses**
- **Commons Associates' Position on Proximate Housing**



MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT 05753

Office of the President

TO THE MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE COMMUNITY

Last Friday, at the conclusion of a retreat where they were joined by the Faculty Council, the Staff Council Executive Committee, and the Student Government Association Executive Committee, the Board of Trustees unanimously adopted the following resolution:

The Board of Trustees resolves:

1. that student life should be one of Middlebury College's "peaks of excellence;"
2. that a residential system comprising continuing membership, decentralized dining, and proximate faculty residences should define that peak;
3. that the College should begin straightway to design and implement this system;
4. that the administration should prepare and present to the Board no later than its May 1998 meeting a ten-year campus facilities plan, at a not-to-exceed total cost of \$210 million, to include the physical requirements of this residential system.

In endorsing the three defining characteristics of a Middlebury residential system, the Board has challenged us to make size and scale the principal features of campus life and has placed individual human relationships at the center of the Middlebury educational experience.

This resolution represents an extraordinary expression of confidence and an equally extraordinary conferral of responsibility. Every detail of this system, beyond the three defining characteristics, will be the design of this community. Faculty, staff, students, parents, alumni are all encouraged to lend their presence and their ideas to the creation of a residential system that will set this College apart from all others by placing the quality of the lives our students live at the center of our work and by recognizing that learning responsibility and accountability is a significant part of a student's education.

The Board has challenged us as a community, over the course of the year ahead, to satisfy them that a system built on the three foundation blocks specified in the resolution is desirable, feasible, and affordable. That's a tall order, but I believe it is doable, and that we will rise to that challenge.

I have asked my colleagues Ron Liebowitz and David Ginevan to design a process to ensure a comprehensive consideration of the many, many issues of implementation that we must address and resolve. More immediately, I have asked the SGA to organize a Town Meeting to discuss the proposal for an enhanced residential system and its implications for the College. **The Town Meeting will take place Tuesday evening, September 16, at 7:30 pm, in McCullough.**

Those of us now present at Middlebury are being asked to design a system of residential life for those who will succeed us here. We are being offered the incredibly rare opportunity to influence in a fundamental way the character of this College. That is an awesome responsibility. The goal is to take something that is very good, and make it better and, in the process, say with clarity, precision, and vigor just what kind of institution we mean for Middlebury College to be.

September 15, 1997

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MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT 05753

(802) 443-5735

Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President

October 8, 1997

To: The College Community
From: Ron Liebowitz
Subject: **Process for campus-wide discussion on an enhanced residential system**

I write to explain the process we plan to follow as we work to develop an enhanced residential system for the College. That process, described in the attached memo, attempts to be inclusive, and seeks input from the entire campus community, from alumni, and from parents. Owing to the nature of the process itself, we may add some steps and sub-committees as we move through the year, or fine-tune some parts of the stages that are scheduled to begin later in the academic year.

As many of you know, the Board of Trustees resolved that residential life shall be a "peak of excellence" at Middlebury, and it also embraced President McCardell's three cornerstones of an enhanced residential system—(1) continuing student membership in a cluster of residence halls; (2) faculty leadership living in close proximity to the residential clusters; and (3) decentralized dining. All other details of the system—e.g., how many "clusters" there will be; whether first-year students will be integrated into the clusters or reside in a first-year set of dormitories; how decentralized dining will work; how faculty and staff will participate in the system; the extent to which students will assume responsibility for the governance of their residential clusters; which of our campus student services will be decentralized in order to provide more effective service; which student clubs and organizations will remain centralized and which will develop in the residence hall clusters; plus many others—need to be determined following wide-ranging discussions.

The enclosed memo outlines the process we plan to follow as we move through the year. Our goal is to present to the Board of Trustees for their consideration (in May 1998) a proposal for an enhanced residential system at Middlebury that speaks to a more seamless fit among our academic, residential, and social programs. It shall also be a proposal that, while sharing important principles with successful residential systems elsewhere, is unquestionably "Middlebury" in spirit and detail.

I hope the process as defined in the enclosed memo will indeed provide the opportunity for your input, whatever your desired level of participation may be. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (ext. 5735 or via e-mail).

Residential Life Steering Committee: Timeline for Completed Work

Following the Board's resolutions in September of 1997, President McCardell appointed a Residential Life Steering Committee to guide the campus-wide discussion and design of the enhanced residential system. Members of the Committee included: Kathy Ebner, Director of Residential Life; Amy Emerson, Office of the Treasurer; Dave Ginevan, Treasurer; Ann Hanson, Dean of Students; Nate Johnson, '98; Beth Karnes, Language Schools; Ron Liebowitz, Provost; Francy Magee, Student Activities; Bob Martin, Mathematics and Computer Science; Brett Millier, American Literature and Civilization; Peter Napolitano, Director of Dining Services; Jim Ralph, History; Elizabeth Robinson, Director of Alumni and Parent Programs; Tim Spears, American Literature and Civilization; Abigale Stoller, '00; Bryan Stratton, '98.

The Steering Committee met regularly throughout the year, gathered information, and solicited feedback from the College community. Below is a chronologically ordered list of the principal work accomplished by that Committee.

- October: began to solicit feedback from Student Steering Committee, Staff Council, and Faculty Council.
- November: distributed 1st questionnaire ("single negotiating text") to community.
- November: established site on World Wide Web to post feedback from community.
- November-March: Student Steering Committee held open meetings with students, leading to submission of Committee report in April.
- January-March: sponsored visits to other schools (Colby, Harvard, Princeton, Rice, Yale). Open forum held to discuss trips.
- Winter Term 1998: hosted open forums focused on the 3 cornerstones and the house system: January 13—the role of the Associate and the Dean; January 20—Social Houses, Academic Interest Houses, and other student organizations; January 22—decentralized dining; January 27—continuing membership; February 25—reports on campus visits.
- January: Student Affairs Division completes its "Response to the Commons Vision Statement."
- February: 2nd questionnaire distributed to community.
- February-March: organized 3 lunches at Proctor and FIC in which students, faculty, and staff discussed residential life.
- March: hosted Chateau dinners for students, faculty, and staff to discuss residential plan in relaxed setting.
- April: organized Trustees' visit to campus and held open meetings for community to respond to some of the Board about the residential plan.
- April: assembled materials to give to Residential Life Committee for drafting of plan.

- - WORK IN PROGRESS - -

STUDENT AFFAIRS DIVISION RESPONSE TO THE COMMONS VISION STATEMENT

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Preface

The following proposal responds to the request that the Student Affairs Division provide suggestions regarding the implementation of President McCardell's vision for a more fully integrated Commons system. As a Division, we accepted the Board of Trustees' and the President's challenge to articulate details "that adhere to the vision's cornerstones, as previously approved by the Board": (1) continuing Commons, (2) proximate faculty living, and (3) decentralized dining. In this document, we present our thoughts on the proposed enhanced Commons system as well as our recommendations with regard to the ways the Student Affairs Division may be reconfigured to best support the academic, residential, and social aspects of life at Middlebury for future students.

We embrace the goal of improving residential life and our students' collegiate experience. We are excited about creating a community in which students, faculty, and staff work together in a mutually supportive environment to achieve our goals. We hope that the proposed changes in our residential structure enhance the intellectual, social, spiritual, and personal development of our students.

This report offers ideas about the following:

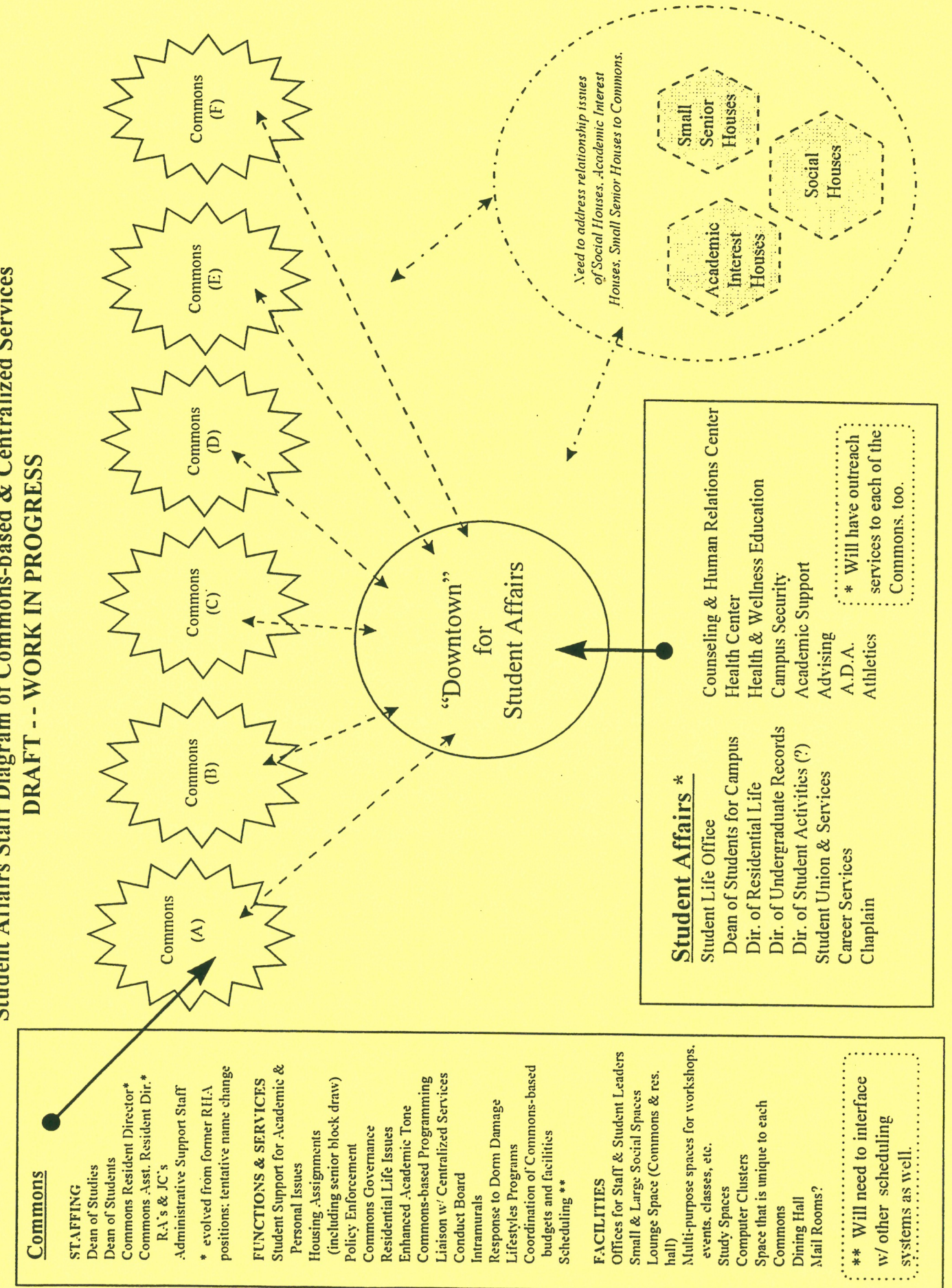
- decentralized "neighborhoods" and ways the Student Affairs Division can contribute to developing more fully integrated communities within the Commons system
- the importance of having a centralized "downtown"
- means by which bridges can be extended between each Commons and the centralized services

Also, included in this report is a diagram of the Student Affairs vision of residential life under the enhanced Commons system.

While we value the goals put forth in the vision statement, we have a number of concerns about the specific model presented to date. This report outlines many of them. We believe that these issues must be resolved before any plans for final approval or implementation are completed.

This proposal attempts to reflect the collective viewpoint of the Student Affairs Division, though we acknowledge that individual members may not be in complete agreement on every point. As a Division, we are committed to providing the best educational and residential system to carry the College, and most importantly, our students successfully into the next century.

Student Affairs Staff Diagram of Commons-based & Centralized Services DRAFT -- WORK IN PROGRESS



II. THE COMMONS ("NEIGHBORHOOD")

We seek to create the best possible residential experience for our students by creating smaller, more intimate communities where there can be a seamless interface among all the varied aspects of a student's educational experience. This process includes involvement of faculty, students, and staff in new and different ways. This section outlines our suggestions with regard to each Commons in terms of Staffing, Decentralized Functions and Services, and Facilities & Equipment.

A. STAFFING (within each Commons)

1. Dean of Studies¹ (faculty member):

- works in partnership w/ the Dean of Students
- serves as the Commons Academic Director
- promotes a community that fosters improved integration among the various aspects of a student's college experience
- sets the intellectual tone for the Commons in a meaningful way
- garners faculty support of and involvement in the Commons
- lives on campus, in proximity to the Commons
- serves as a member of the Crisis Management Team
- serves as the Commons Council Advisor; coordinates Commons Council Executive Board and participates in Commons Council Meetings
- acts as a liaison with Commons Affiliates
- ensures that students within the Commons have access to appropriate academic support
- has an office within the Commons with appropriate administrative assistance

2. Dean of Students (student affairs professional):

- works in partnership with the Dean of Studies
- promotes a community that fosters improved integration among the various aspects of a student's college experience
- enhances the intellectual tone for the Commons in a meaningful way

¹ Members of the Middlebury campus have suggested alternative names for the faculty member role. These include: Commons Scholar, Faculty Associate, and Commons Associate. In this document, we use the Dean of Studies title to describe the faculty member role in the Commons.

- serves as the Commons Operating Officer
- supervises Commons Residential Staff with the centralized Director of Residential Life
- oversees Policy/Standards enforcement
- counsels students in need
- serves as the Coordinator of the Crisis Management Team
- lives off campus, but will participate actively as a member of the Commons
- assists with Academic Advising
- has an office in the Commons with appropriate administrative assistance

3. Commons Residential Staff:

In the new model, we envision the Commons as having additional residential staff to handle the duties no longer handled by a centralized Residential Life Office and to assist the Dean of Students. To some degree, the staffing for the new model will depend on the background and experience of the overall Commons leadership and their Student Affairs experience.

Our recommendation includes a Commons Resident Director and a Commons Assistant Resident Director² per Commons who function in a tiered system that would allow for increased responsibility and compensation for each year of a 2-3 year term. These residential life staff members would usually make a two year commitment to the College, serving first as a Commons Assistant Resident Director and then, upon their return for a second year, would serve as a Commons Resident Director. A Commons Resident Director could agree to stay on for a third year in a role defined as an Assistant to the Dean of Students, in which case that Commons would have an Assistant to the Dean of Students and a Commons Assistant Resident Director rather than a Commons Resident Director and a Commons Assistant Resident Director.

We provide the following outline as a sample of some of the responsibilities of the Commons Assistant Resident Director and the Commons Resident Director (and/or Assistant to the Dean of Students) roles. While these are the general responsibilities, the levels of exact responsibility would be graduated with experience and title.

² These two appointments evolve from the former R.H.A. positions, offer a tentative name change, and provide a better defined professional progression, along with a correspondingly increased remuneration.

a. Commons Resident Director and the Commons Assistant Resident Director (and/or Assistant to the Dean of Students) [again, evolved from current R.H.A.s]:

- paid, live-in professional staff positions
- work with Commons staff, the central Student Life Office, and other offices on campus; serve as liaison between students and administration
- apartments and offices in Commons
- graduates of Middlebury College and/or persons with Residential Life experience and/or a master's degree or pursuing higher education; Middlebury College graduates, who are already familiar with the facilities, staff, and Commons system and could be selected from within their own Commons, would be strong candidates
- report to the Dean of Students in their Commons and to the Director of Residential Life
- responsibilities include:
 - * housing
 - * facilities liaison
 - * Commons programming
 - * advising, personal guidance, and referrals
 - * supervision of residential life staff (i.e., Resident Assistants, Junior Counselors)
 - * collaboration with Dean of Students and Dean of Studies on issues related to social and academic life, including discipline
 - * liaison and support to "downtown" services
 - * advising and supporting student organizations that wish to develop within each Commons (e.g., a Commons may have their own singing group or Improv players group)
 - * coordination of community service projects within each Commons
 - * leadership development and training for student leaders within the Commons

b. Resident Assistant (exists currently as R.A.):

- paid student leader position (a Middlebury College senior or junior)
- works with Dean of Studies, Dean of Students, Commons Assistant Resident Director and the Commons Resident Director (and/or Assistant to the Dean of Students), and the students of their Commons
- reports to Commons Assistant Resident Director and the Commons Resident Director (and/or Assistant to the Dean of Students)
- picked from within their Commons
- number based upon size and needs of each Commons
- responsible for:
 - * peer counseling
 - * Lifestyles programming
 - * facilities management
 - * serving as a liaison between administration and students
- would have additional leadership role in the management of the Commons

c. Junior Counselor staff (currently in existence):

- unpaid student leader position (a Middlebury College junior)
- supports and advises first-year students as they adjust to the College
- works with Dean of Studies, Dean of Students, Commons Assistant Resident Director and the Commons Resident Director (and/or Assistant to the Dean of Students), and students
- reports to Commons Assistant Resident Director and the Commons Resident Director (and/or Assistant to the Dean of Students)
- lives in residence halls with access to appropriate space for holding small hall meetings and gatherings
- focuses primarily on residential, academic, and personal peer counseling

4. Administrative Staff:

- provides direct clerical support for Dean of Studies and Dean of Students
- assists Commons Residential and Programming Staff
- supervises student receptionists

B. DECENTRALIZED FUNCTIONS & SERVICES (within each Commons)

- student support for academic and personal issues
- housing assignments
- policy enforcement
- Commons governance
 - * have a broader focus with three branches- Judicial Board (Commons Conduct Board?), Social Programming Board, and Facilities Board (i.e. Dorm Damage)
 - * include Residential Life staff and elected Commons members
 - * serve and lead these three boards under the advisement of the professional Commons staff
- residential life issues
- Commons-based programming
- conduct board
- intramurals
 - * coordinate a Commons-based intramural program with Athletics (might be overseen by Commons Resident Director or Commons Assistant Resident Director)
- response to dorm damage
- substance-free options (housing & programming)
- "Lifestyles" programs (in consultation with the Office of Health and Wellness Education)
- coordination of Commons-based budgets & facilities
- scheduling
- liaison w/ centralized services
- unresolved: need to determine relationship(s) with social and academic interest houses

C. FACILITIES & EQUIPMENT (within each Commons)

- office space for staff and students
- spaces for lounges, social activities, workshops, and classrooms
- dining hall
- study spaces
- multi-media equipment (sound equipment?)

- alternative space
 - * it is essential that Residential Life staff have space to handle roommate conflicts or crisis situations and to allow for moves; without this space, students, parents and residential life staff can be left in unacceptable situations
 - * 2-3 spaces per Commons to allow for "breathing room"
 - * Space could be used to accommodate Commons guest lecturers and visitors, etc.
- computer clusters
- amenities (i.e., those recreational or social spaces unique to each Commons that makes them special)
- outdoor grill & patio area

III. THE "VIBRANT DOWNTOWN"

Key to the overall success of the enhanced Commons system for Middlebury College is the creation of a "vibrant downtown," centered around an active Student Union. This "downtown" offers:

- an environment that supports the neighborhood-based Commons system and its functions.
- a place for students to feel that they are part of the larger Middlebury College community, and to connect with the institution.
- a contrasting experience to the otherwise decentralized communities and services on campus.
- a vibrant center that provides many of the services and facilities that are not replicated in the surrounding area due to our rural location.

In creating the new system, we aim to instill in students a sense of pride in one's Commons. At the same time, as a small, residential college, we know that it is important for students to build ties to the institution as well. The "vibrant downtown" is an integral part in developing a bond with the College.

We envision Middlebury's Student Union at the heart of this "vibrant downtown" image. The Student Union of the future will replace the Proctor of today. The new Student Union provides the functions, services, and physical spaces that are not readily available in our somewhat isolated environment. While Commons models at other institutions may not include a student union or a "vibrant downtown" with an array of community-based support services, we must keep in mind the unique nature of Middlebury's enhanced Commons system. We need a lively Student Union for several reasons, including:

- The College's rural location presents geographic and environmental challenges.
- The lack of easy access to a wide range of opportunities and services to which students may have become accustomed prior to their arrival at the College.
- The need for opportunities for cross-Commons interaction.
- The importance of student participation in campus-wide activities and events that will enable them to feel that they are a part of the larger whole, Middlebury College.

It is important to incorporate additional functions and services in a Student Union and a centralized "downtown" to improve the quality of life at Middlebury and to benefit students and the broader College community.

The new Student Union, which supports and hosts campus-wide events and activities, includes:

- Information Desk
- a central "living room" with fireplace and in-door and outdoor lounge spaces
- food options
- recreational options
- student union services—phones (campus and public), computer stations (to check e-mail, etc.), dry-cleaning?, fax machine, photocopying, change machines, etc.
- College bookstore
- mail room / US postal service
- convenience store (video rentals?)
- Student Activities (including student employment & volunteer services)
- coordination of equipment for use in the student union and in other general-use spaces
- scheduling of spaces (see issues/concerns section)
- spaces for study, performance, meetings, student organizations (offices and/or meeting rooms), informal gatherings, and social activities (need to consider space for large, all-campus events)
- lecture hall/multi-purpose space?—capacity of 700-1000 or more for all-campus events w/ catering facilities and flexibility to sub-divide room

There are a number of reasons for maintaining some centralized offices and services. The reasons are both economic, practical, and relate to the nature of the services provided. The arguments for not decentralizing all functions and services are as follows:

- In many ways, duplicating staff, services, and structures is not economically feasible. In the new model, some offices may be better suited to offer services from a central location, with outreach programs to each of the Commons communities. This is particularly true of services that require multiple shifts to provide coverage all day, every day of the week.
- Some offices because of the nature of their work may be less able to decentralize. This is particularly true for positions that require specialized training. It would be too costly and our enrollment is too small to necessitate the creation of six separate communities that do not encourage or facilitate campus-wide interaction.

- Total decentralization of the Division would make it difficult for external constituents to communicate with various parts of the College community. By maintaining centralized offices/positions, the lines of communication would be clearer and more direct, especially for external audiences wanting to connect with the College, particularly in terms of Undergraduate Records, Campus Security, Volunteer Services, and Residential Life.
- The centralized functions and services are unique services that cannot be duplicated in an economically feasible way, or are areas that support campus-wide issues and programs. The centralized services deal with issues that cut across the Commons, including support for all-campus events, organizations, and clubs.

In addition to the Student Union, other offices will comprise the sense of a "vibrant downtown." While these offices may not be located in exactly the same location, their services will be centralized. In most cases, the "downtown" functions and services will provide bridges or links to each of the Commons. These centralized functions include:

- a new Office of Student Life, including the Dean of Student Life (who serves as the Dean of all the deans of students from each Commons), the Director of Residential Life, the Director of Undergraduate Records, and administrative support
- Student Activities, which coordinates the management of the Student Union, student employment, and any activities and programs which transcend across the whole College and Commons system
- Health Center Services
- the Counseling and Human Relations Center
- the Office of Health & Wellness Education
- Campus Security
- the Office of the College Chaplain
- the Office of Academic Support
- the Office of Academic Advising

A "vibrant downtown," located centrally, provides:

- Specialized services will be delivered through a centralized office so that staff members with particular expertise can provide support to each of the Commons and to the broader Middlebury community as appropriate (i.e. Campus Security, Office of Health and Wellness Education, Counseling and Human Relations Center, Health Services, and so on.) This could include other areas of specialization such as International Student Advising, Advising for Students of Color, and the Americans with Disabilities Act services.
- Consistent, campus-wide support in terms of establishing links among the deans of students from each Commons, providing training for residential life staff, and implementation and enforcement of college-wide policies.
- 24-hour/7-day per week services that involve three staffing shifts and would require a dramatic expansion in our staff if we were to offer these services in each of the six Commons (i.e. Campus Security, Health Services, and others).
- Quality control, especially in terms of ensuring security, confidentiality, and the integrity of things such as student records, transcripts, and other concerns as they relate to upholding an institutional standard and/or guaranteeing that certain information is protected.

Rather than describe the functions and services of each of the centralized offices or services, we provide a rationale for a "vibrant downtown" in this section. Additional details about the role each office plays in a Commons-based system can be found in the Appendix.

Clearly, all offices within the Student Affairs Division will have connections to the Commons whether they are decentralized or centralized. In addition, there are other offices not directly within the Division of Student Affairs that will also provide links to the Commons. For example, it is our understanding that the Career Services Office will remain centralized, though they will most likely offer some Commons-based programming. Similarly, the Athletics Department will continue from a central administration within the athletic complex, with intercollegiate and club athletic teams drawing students from across campus. However, it is our understanding that intramural sports teams will be Commons-based.

The next section gives further examples of how bridges can be extended from centralized Student Affairs services to each of the Commons.

B. Examples of Possible Bridges Between Centralized Services and the Commons

1. Office of Student Life

- trains and supports the Dean of Students in each Commons as well as the other members of the Commons Residential Life staff.
- ensures positive and productive relationships among the student affairs departments and each Commons
- oversees campus conduct—major issues and honor code cases—the results of which may affect individuals in each Commons
- develops policies and systems for monitoring and enhancing student life at the College and in each Commons
- develops policies and systems for managing the residential life of the College
- provides links for the Deans and the Commons Residential Life staff from the Commons to the centralized student record system

2. Office of Academic Support

- located in a centralized office with programming delivered in a Commons venue in a decentralized manner
- support services include:
 - * study skills workshops
 - * peer tutoring sessions and training
 - * participation in orientation/residential life programs
 - * consultations with faculty members and the Commons staff to review students' progress in certain areas
 - * contacts with student organizations, teams, and other groups of students
 - * peer tutors
 - * computer consultants
 - * the formation of study groups in each Commons

3. Counseling & Human Relations Center

- counselors serve as consultants to each Commons
 - * affiliated with several "neighborhoods"
 - * assist with problem-solving and programming
 - * rotate among the Commons from semester to semester so that students in each Commons would have an opportunity to work with each counselor at some point during the year
- satellite counseling programs could be offered in the Commons (as we do now with a nutritionist in Hepburn and an affiliation with the training room); however, most student appointments would be made and conducted through the centralized office to protect student confidentiality and to continue to allow necessary and effective referral to and from the Health Center and Security Office, particularly for in-patient care

4. Office of Health and Wellness Education

- provide consultation on wellness initiatives with the Lifestyles program
- serve as an educational consultant to disciplinary boards with regard to substance abuse and acting out behavior, and appropriate referral options
- offer outreach health and wellness education programs, workshops, and discussions to each Commons on health education, wellness, and harassment topics
- work with Commons Resident Director and Assistant Director to "trouble shoot" and provide programming when issues arise in a Commons (i.e. drug infractions, etc.)
- help Director of Residential Life to train residence hall staff in a Commons with regard to health and wellness issues
- student leader liaisons from the Commons
 - * work directly with the Health and Wellness Educator to address health and wellness issues in their Commons
 - * may be members of the Commons residential staff (RA's, JC's)

5. Campus Security Office

- remains centralized and located in close proximity to the Health Center, the Counseling & Human Relations Center, and the Office of Health & Wellness Education, however, each Security Officer is affiliated with a Commons but their patrols and responsibilities remain campus-wide
- Campus Security programs and/or workshops are Commons-based; the officer affiliated with a particular Commons coordinates the event with the Commons staff

IV. ISSUES & CONCERNS

In exploring ways to become an integral part of the enhanced Commons system, the Student Affairs Division has identified a number of unresolved issues that should be addressed before moving forward with the new Commons vision. Addressing these issues will enable the College to develop a sound model that will take into account the many details that we must consider to improve residential life through Middlebury's enhanced Commons system.

In this section, we summarize some key issues and concerns that were highlighted in our many discussions. As the Commons project evolves, the Division and the community can focus their efforts on the detailed list of questions inherent in each of the broader categories mentioned here.³

A. Staffing

- duplication of staff/services—overall concern about the affordability of the expansion and duplication of staff and services: there may be other ways to achieve the stated goals
- additional staff needed—to make Residential Life a “peak” will require additional staff regardless of the way the Commons model will be implemented, but particularly if we decentralize and develop parallel structures within each Commons; in addition to the facilities costs, the increase in staff will have implications for funding
- reporting structures (within the College and the Commons), staff titles, qualifications, job responsibilities, professional peer groups, professional development and training, performance reviews, duration of appointments and renewal processes, etc., for the various positions within the Commons and among the centralized services are still unclear
- diversity and continuing Commons—if there is continuing commons, should there be a person on staff whose primary role is to support students across all Commons regarding issues of diversity (e.g., cultural, racial, ethnic, sexual preference, etc.)?

³ We have kept our extensive list of issues and concerns so that we may address them at a future point in the process.

- create a Dean of Studies Council—how will it function? how will the Associates want to work with one another? what support will be required?
- create a Dean of Students Council—how will it function? it is important for the Deans of Students in each Commons to work together both for professional support and to ensure a more consistent approach to Middlebury College's policies?

B. Information Technology

- technological infrastructure—the enhanced Commons system will require a cohesive technological base to support the efforts of the individuals involved in the new system. Topics to be addressed include:
 - * access to student records (viewing, input, and so on)
 - * efficiency and confidentiality issues
 - * cross-campus communication

C. Commons-based Functions/Services versus Centralized Functions/Services

As we consider the pros and cons of decentralized functions as compared to centralized services, we have many questions regarding:

- issues of efficiency and confidentiality
- consistency—creation, management, and enforcement of college-wide policies and commons-based policies: consistency? how managed?
- professional peer groups—immediate professional support and camaraderie available from peers in centralized or decentralized models
- specialization/expertise—do specialists best serve the community from a central location?
- conflicting roles within the Commons—counseling and support along with discipline and policy enforcement – who is responsible for what?
- judicial issues and codes of conduct (within Commons vs. central judicial board)
- mail services—expanded & decentralized or centralized?
- issues around campus-wide occasions and special events (Orientation, Commencement, etc.)

- funding--for Commons activities, campus-wide events, student organizations, professional development, departmental or office programming that is not Commons-related
- student organization structure--campus-wide or Commons-based organizations
- the house systems--role of academic interest houses, social houses, and small senior houses in this model, connections to the centralized services, and to a Commons

D. Facilities

- will our facilities and housing availability across campus attain equity in their desirability so that continuing commons can be a viable option? by what date? what are the implications for the full Commons concept in the meantime?
- flexible facilities and infrastructure—to meet the needs of the proposed system and yet remain as versatile as possible for future changes in priorities
- scheduling of spaces—allowing for ample and appropriate options: Commons space and space available to non-Commons individuals and events (connected to residence halls and not)
- capacity issues--We need to seek to resolve those problems that already exist on campus with respect to seating/standing capacities, while also building for an increased size in the student body: we need a space where 700-900 people can be accommodated (e.g., Student Union) for class meetings, Orientation, or special events dinners
- dining in each Commons--need flexible space configurations so they can be small or large depending upon needs: could consider a smaller dining hall that serves several meal sittings and is located in a place with adjacent space that could be opened to create space for dining and/or events that could accommodate the entire Commons
- athletic team dining--need to accommodate athletic teams eating together throughout their seasons and deal with their respective schedule constraints
- holiday housing--need to accommodate special holiday housing needs of international students and athletic team members

E. Other/General

- must support “full Commons” concept with “full Commons” funding levels: cannot support expanded model with partial funding: can we afford the ongoing operating costs, in addition to the start-up/creation costs?
- needs of diverse students
 - * in general—ways to support and serve students who are at-risk, psychologically and socially vulnerable, students of color, international students, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender students, of different cultural heritage, class background, and so on: must consider the:
 1. Creation of support systems and networks around identity development
 2. Education of the entire community on issues related to diversity
 - * in each Commons—need to resolve the challenge of creating culturally diverse communities in each of the Commons while paying attention to the individual needs of diverse students who may feel less safe in fewer numbers spread across all the Commons
- February enrollment—will this continue? if so, how will “Febs” fit into this model? what accommodations must be made to ensure a smooth transition for students entering into Commons life and Middlebury mid-year?
- student choice—what role do students’ personal preferences play? student options, including choice of Dean of Students, will be limited in this model; how can we best accommodate choice within the Commons model, especially given the students’ desire and Middlebury College’s tradition for access to options (e.g., access to staff, services, amenities, accommodations) in just about all aspects of their life on campus? how do we allow for student/Dean incompatibility?
- evaluation—how do we ensure that we achieve the goals of the enhanced Commons system?
- committees—what role will Committees play on this campus? who will staff the committees? currently, Deans are generalists with specific roles and responsibilities; thus, every Dean does not sit on the same committee; we need to make sure that the new Commons model does not increase administrative duties (such as Committee memberships) and therefore inhibit increased contact with students
- housing assignments and room draw—support and systems: how will the role of substance-free housing play out in the Commons model?
- crisis management—does the team model work? what would need to change as a result of a decentralized Commons model?

- student government—in what ways will the model change decision-making? what role will committees play? how will SGA be configured?
- timing issues—when will all of this happen? how will we implement this over time?
- “One Stop Shopping”—this concept of creating a new department where most student and parent questions can be resolved (e.g., accounting, financial aid, student life, etc.) within one office has been discussed within the administration and explored in preliminary ways; is this desirable with the full Commons model?—if yes, would it be included as part of the Student Union?

V. Appendix

The following further describes those offices that, along with the Student Union, comprise the “vibrant” downtown:

A. The Office of Student Life

- supports all offices that contribute to enhancing student life at the College
- staffed by a Dean of Student Life (the Dean of the deans of students for each Commons), the Director of Residential Life, the Director of Undergraduate Records, and administrative assistant(s). This office may include other professional staff that meet specialized needs of the student population and provide expertise, such as an International Student Advisor and Advisor to Students of Color and so on
- develops and enforces College policies that affect student life across campus and in the Commons
- issues transcripts, maintains undergraduate records, addresses significant judicial issues that cannot be handled at the Commons-level, oversees the residential life of the College, coordinate and oversee College-wide policies, and so on

B. The Office of Student Activities

- coordinates management of the Student Union and advises its programming board
- cultivates a sense of “downtown” (bringing the community together across all Commons) and provides centralized services (e.g., equipment, information, services, etc.)
- coordinates centralized aspects of leadership development, volunteer services, and other activities and events – and provides outreach services to the Commons, Social Houses, and Academic Interest Houses
- coordinates year-round student employment program
- works with Commons and supports their activities in whatever ways possible; assists with collaborative efforts

F. Office of Health & Wellness Education

- has a centralized office with support staff
- located in close proximity to the Health Center, the Counseling & Human Relations Center, and Campus Security
- works collaboratively with Health Center, Counseling staff, Commons staff, and the Dean of Campus Life
- continues to provide education and consultation to faculty, staff and parents
- continues to provide campus-wide student education
- provides small group discussions, workshops, and training which is Commons based
- provides training through collaboration with the Director of Residential Life for student residential staff
- works in collaboration with Dean of Faculty to provide education and training for new faculty on issues of harassment, alcohol, and academics
- provides consultation on wellness initiatives with the Lifestyles program
- serves as an educational consultant to disciplinary boards with regard to substance abuse and acting out behavior, and appropriate referral options
- offers outreach health and wellness education programs, workshops, and discussions to each Commons on both health education, wellness, and harassment topics
- works with Commons Resident Director and Assistant Director to "trouble shoot" and provide programming when issues arise in a Commons (i.e. drug infractions, etc.)
- works cooperatively with the Director of Residential Life to train residence hall staff in a Commons with regard to health and wellness issues
- support student health education initiatives

G. Office of the College Chaplain

- resides "downtown" to coordinate the increasingly diverse religious needs of students across campus
- works with students to help them enhance their spiritual life
- in a plan that is currently being developed, the religious and spiritual organizations may use space in a Commons for their meetings and/or events, but the coordination of religious and spiritual life of the College will continue from a centralized model.
- if plans for an Inter-Faith Center are approved, it would ideally be located "downtown."

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H. Office of Academic Support

- uses prevention and intervention strategies to assist students in meeting their academic goals
- the office:
 - * is located centrally, although many of the programs and services could be offered through a decentralized system.

- * is a place where students can go to receive assistance with their academic work and provides an environment conducive to enhancing the academic potential of Middlebury College students.
- * administers the Pre-Enrollment Program (PEP), provide Academic Skills Workshops, Peer Tutoring, projects with the Dean of Students Office, information and support outreach to faculty and the greater campus community, and individual appointments with students.
- * provides additional academic support, particularly in relation to specific areas of the curriculum. There is a need for a more extensive support program for the Sciences.
- * is involved in Academic Tracking for students on Academic Probation, and handling personal crises would be coordinated from the central office. However, the Commons staff may work closely with the Office of Academic Support to assist students with their academic progress and who encounter crisis situations.
- * the Office of Academic Support continues to work closely with the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Office. This relationship continues at a centralized level, with coordination between the two offices in conjunction with the Commons staff as Commons-based ADA compliance strategies are developed.
- * the Office of Academic Support also continues to work closely with the First-Year Seminar Program

I. Office of Academic Advising

- coordination of faculty advisors
- serves students in transition to Major Advisors
- supplemental advising to that provided by Dean of Studies and Dean of Students
- while services are centralized, office could be within a Commons

Student Steering Committee Recommendations 15 April 1998

I. Introduction

In light of the September 1997 Board of Trustee resolution to recommend Residential Life at Middlebury College as a "peak of excellence," the Student Steering Committee facilitated the process of campus-wide reaction, discussion, and recommendation. By meeting every week to maintain our focus, the committee organized discussions and opportunities for student input, provided information to the entire community, and engaged the Enhanced Residential Plan for several months.

As a committee, our discussion primarily has been based on the premise that the "Commons" would be the vehicle for Middlebury reaching residential life as a "peak of excellence." In discussion, we recognized challenges that Middlebury faces in enhancing residential life, however, we were unable to find compelling evidence that the Commons was the only solution. Our document is written as a recommendation of what we feel is the best possible application of the proposed Enhanced Residential Plan.

We believe that the student life at Middlebury College could be improved and the Student Steering Committee Recommendations illuminate advantages of the proposal while also acknowledging its weaknesses. This document considers all three "cornerstones" of the residential proposal: faculty proximity, decentralized dining, and continuing membership. It also makes recommendations on two more pertinent issues in the minds of Middlebury students: the role of the house system and the question of diversity. We have also included an appendix that outlines steps that could be taken to improve Middlebury's residential life immediately and independent of the Commons based model. It describes both what the Student Steering Committee sees as benefits and advantages as well as what we fear could result without proper implementation. The proposal we submit is the most appropriate model for residential life at Middlebury College in the context of a Commons based system.

We also believe that our recommendations speak in a responsible student voice. A large majority of the student body sees little benefit in changing the status quo. This, we believe, is understandable. As students, we cannot envision a system contrary to what we consider to be intrinsically Middlebury. But the Student Steering Committee also recognizes the progressive mentality that typifies our small college and hopes that our recommendations will be considered with the contextual difficulties in mind.

The Student Steering Committee was appointed with attaining a variety of views and unique backgrounds. We are confident in our presence as a "task force." Our committee has strong representative qualities of interest and experiences: SGA, social houses, different classes, wide array of residential experiences, and positions throughout the college community. It is our own diversity of opinions, backgrounds, and experiences that affords us our status of representatives of the student body. No other group of students has engaged the residential proposal as extensively as our committee and our recommendations only surfaced after months of heated debate and discussion. Some of the specifics below are controversial issues which required majority votes to decide upon within the committee, let alone the student body as a whole. The task at hand was to figure out how such a *proposed* system would work in its ideal form at Middlebury. We believe we have achieved our goal.

A. Mission Statement

To design and maintain focus in comprehensive discussions of the residential proposal. We provide a process for student involvement: an avenue for student reaction, discussion, and concern. We collected relevant information, provided reality checks, and directed our recommendations back to the residential life committee.

B. Goals

Our goals were simple: to offer every Middlebury student an opportunity to enter the discussion; to provide students with information about the proposal and dispel any false rumors; to act as liaisons between student voices and the residential life committee; to ensure that the final proposal maintains the integrity of Middlebury College both as we know it today and as we expect it to become.

C. The Process (October 1997-April 1998)

October Creating a Plan of Attack

The Student Steering Committee was selected to ensure as diverse a range of student voices as possible. The initial few weeks were spent reacting to the document on a personal level before discussing how to share the proposal with the larger student body. SSC members discussed groups to visit, questions to ask, and ways to facilitate campus meetings.

November/December Campus Meetings and Organization Visits

Over the course of two months, representatives from the SSC led discussions throughout the campus. Forums were held with commons councils, academic interest houses, social houses, student organizations, and residence halls. The majority of our information was collected through hearing student reactions and concerns. This was not considered as an opportunity to "sell" the proposal. In this stage we also urged individual organizations to draft specific recommendations to be incorporated into the final proposal.

January Continuing Membership/House System Discussion

Meeting two or three times a week allowed us to recall the larger discussions of first semester and focus them on more specific issues. As the residential population of this college, the continuing membership issue is one with which we feel most qualified and we attempted to look into the minute details of implementation and philosophy. The house system discussion stemmed from a reaction to a larger campus discussion on issues of exclusivity, dorm damage, and underage drinking. The Steering Committee also hosted a series of open forums on specific topics; members of the SSC sat on each panel.

January/February College Visitations and Diversity Discussions

Student representatives joined the Middlebury delegations to Colby, Harvard, Princeton, Rice, and Yale, returning to the committee with valuable insights on the residential situations at contemporary universities. In light of growing concern from faculty and students about issues of diversity in the new residential proposal, we also attempted to delve deeper into the issue and recommended that a subcommittee look at an integral issue, though time constraints curtailed the discussion. On February 20, students presented the reports of their college visits to the Board of Trustees in Old Chapel.

March Final Revisions and Presentation to Student Body

Our final marathon meetings provided a chance to summarize the reaction of the student body and add individual recommendations to the document. Attempting to reach consensus, but realizing that certain issues were too divisive, the Student Steering Committee processed and revised its extensive information into this document. It will be submitted to the student body for further reaction and revised one final time before it is presented to the Residential Life Committee so that they may incorporate student opinions into the final proposal.

D. Committee Members

Due to students going on and returning from semesters abroad, the membership of the SSC fluctuated slightly. However, each meeting was consistently attended by a dozen students. The following students were appointed by Kathy Ebner '87, Director of Residential Life, Francy Magee, Assistant Director of Student Activities, Rob Birdsong '97, Atwater Commons Residence Hall Advisor, and Nathan Johnson '98, Student Chair.

Leena Anderson '98	Slavko Andrejevic '98	Brad Demong '99**
Athena Fliakos '99*	David Gwinn '99*	Julie Haas '00
Michael Hartt '01	Liza Hinman '99*	Elizabeth Levy '01
Andrew Mahlstedt '98**	Suzanne Minott '99**	Reetie Moisio '99*
John Overbay '99**	David Paul '00	Carri Smith '98
Abby Stoller '00	Patricia Zlotek '98	
* = first semester	** = second semester	

We begin with a discussion of the three cornerstones: faculty proximity, decentralized dining, and continuing membership. The Enhanced Residential Plan should be referenced to examine the original ideas which we seek to discuss and rethink.

II. Faculty and Staff Proximity

Student debate over the notion of faculty and staff proximity defines the cornerstone as related to office spaces and proximate residences. To most students it seems realistic and understandable to encourage faculty/staff/student interaction during the daytime hours. Negative opinions flare, on the other hand, when one interprets "proximity" as mandating the on-campus, dormitory-based system of faculty residences. Our discussion of faculty proximity is threefold: defining the roles of affiliated faculty and staff within the residential system, determining the housing scheme for deans and associates, and conceptualizing office spaces within each Commons to ensure successful programming and interaction.

A. Proposed Roles of Faculty and Staff Members

We envision a successful partnership within each Commons consisting of a Dean and Associate (Master), and complemented by several Affiliates (Fellows). Since we do not see advantages to using the established words (Master/Fellow), we refer instead to the status quo terminology. Proposed definitions are listed below:

i. Dean of Students

Each commons structure will have its own dean whose role is to maintain discipline and academic consultation. To ensure consistency of campus-wide policy, a Head Dean will occupy a centralized office position. Each commons Dean will work in a visible, decentralized office space so that informal interaction may complement formal responsibilities. In order to foster close relationships between a Dean and his/her students, any student living in the same commons for four years will retain the same Dean.

ii. Associate

Each commons will also have its own Associate, a position eligible to faculty and staff members with seven years of experience at Middlebury. Though it is recommended, tenure is not a requirement for eligibility. The Associate will work closely with the Dean, Residence Hall Advisor, and Commons Council in planning events, fostering community, and developing relationships. The Associate will have no literal disciplinary role. Students will recommend to the administration which faculty and staff members they would recruit to be new Associates. Students will also play an active role in interviewing and selecting the candidate. No term limit is recommended but an Associate ought to reapply to maintain

his/her position. The Associate will be supported monetarily from the administration and compensated in a similar fashion as the status quo (housing/lighter load of responsibilities).

iii. *Affiliates*

New faculty and staff members will continue to be randomly placed (except in the case of spousal arrangements) to each Commons. Ideally, no requirements are necessary but involvement in the system will be strongly encouraged. Affiliates will help bring academic and cultural events onto campus and work with students to increase awareness of the greater community of Middlebury. Like the Associate, Affiliates have no disciplinary role. They will be encouraged to join students in the dining halls on a regular basis to foster healthy social and intellectual relationships. Again, a heightened visibility of faculty and staff members during daytime hours and outside of the classroom will aid Middlebury's pursuit of creating a more respectful community.

iv. *Community Affiliates*

These would be volunteers not directly affiliated with the college who wish to be involved. They would be actively recruited by Commons members to provide outlets and opportunities beyond the boundaries of Middlebury College.

B. Defining Proximity: Housing

The Student Steering Committee recommends that the college mandate the residential options of the commons Associate. Since Deans carry disciplinary roles and Affiliates have less close interaction with students, it seems unfair to both parties to require proximate housing.¹

Associates, on the other hand, need a residential space to provide a homelike atmosphere for affiliated students as well as a convenient location to house guest lecturers, hold events, and entertain faculty and staff members. **It should be the goal of the architects to create residential environments for both faculty associates and students that provides community while simultaneously offering privacy.** It is crucial to the success of developing faculty/student mutual respect that necessary housing remains independent of residence halls.

C. Defining Proximity: Office Spaces

We envision a single office space which would cater to the tasks of the Dean, Associate, Resident Hall Advisor, paid Secretary, and Commons Council. The Activity Coordinator's office would be the central artery through which communication and interaction traveled: parties and lounge space reservations, transcript requests, meeting schedules. To ensure proximity and visibility within the Commons, these decentralized offices would be located either in a residence hall or attached to the common space. Ideally, each member of the Commons would pass near this office space each day. Essentially, consolidation of function provided opportunity for casual interaction.

As for the offices of faculty affiliates, one of the weaknesses of the status quo is a lack of solidarity within certain departments. To encourage all members of a department to remain in one location — resulting in a higher level of convenience for students and faculty alike — we recommend that faculty offices remain in their academic departments to avoid fragmentation and confusion. Academics will remain centralized and no Commons-specific courses will be offered.

¹A minority opinion on the committee pointed out that Yale University, where Deans live on campus without a disciplinary role, mandated on-campus residency for these positions.

III. Decentralized Dining

Dining is arguably the most crucial cornerstone in the residential proposal. Since we dine everyday, we can use this time to create and foster community within and between each individual Commons. Student backlash to the notion of decentralized dining has been considerable. Despite its relative inconvenience and infamous traffic jams, Upper Proctor effectively functions as the "downtown" of status quo Middlebury. It acts, therefore, as not only a place to eat, but as a place to socialize as well. We recognize the importance of having a "big experience" at a rural, liberal arts college and agree with most students that removing such an environment would be detrimental. Our recommendations — particularly the variety of dining hall sizes — seek to simultaneously represent student voices and remain progressive in thought.

More importantly, we maintain that these recommendations will be realized only in the presence of a successful student center. According to the Student Affairs Response, the new Student Union includes: information desk, a central living room, food options, recreational options, college bookstore, mailroom/postal services, student activities, convenience/video store, meeting space, and a large multi-purpose space to fit 700-1000. This "downtown" would complement the Commons "neighborhoods." For more thoughts on the Student Union, please see section VI.

A. Student Expectations of the Dining Experience

We make recommendations on decentralized dining with the following student expectations in mind. Food choice and variety ought not be compromised. Dining halls should be convenient and within reasonable proximity to classrooms and residence halls alike. Students desire, for the most part, a calm and relaxing eating experience with the visibility, or "scoping," aspect in mind. Most importantly, we recommend that existing structures be renovated and used whenever possible.

B. Dining and Affiliation: How it Should Work

Students enjoy eating with their friends, so students will not be required to dine in their Commons. For particular events — like a Atwater Commons ChowderFest — dining hall could be closed for "private/Commons only" use. Requirements and details for this situations would follow the logistics of status quo Commons barbecues.

Each Commons will be affiliated with an individual dining space. This affiliation would encourage Commons members to eat in their own areas but not require it. Since students would remain mobile throughout the various dining halls on campus, we envision that breakfast and dinner would tend to be eaten near one's residence hall (as is the case today) and lunchtime would become the Great Campus Melting Pot as students would eat nearest their classrooms or meeting location.

C. Dining Structures

Since each Commons would be in physical proximity to their own dining space, the issue of expanding infrastructure arises. We recommend that each Commons has its own dining hall and desire small intimate spaces and large social spaces. We see community and identity created in flexible, unique, and fantastic dining spaces.

The Commons system would also call for dining halls of various sizes and the consideration of "transformable" spaces. However, it is also important that dining halls located near Bicentennial Hall and other classrooms have the option to expand during lunchtime hours. Expandable dining areas allow students to pursue the "big experience" along with creating an opportunity for campus-wide dinners currently possible only in Pepin Gym or on Proctor Terrace. We want to maintain a "Freeman-type" dining center. One Commons should be able to seat large groups of people for special events.

To maximize the usability of space, each Commons dining hall would be convertible into a social space large enough to hold parties and formal enough to host major lectures and academic events. Therefore, it would be advisable to build a stage and sound system into each dining space.

D. Defining Proximity: Dining

One of the crucial aspects of this vision is the success of the decentralized dining program and the possible interaction between faculty, staff, and students that could occur in more comfortable eating environments. The goal of interactive dining would be to create new relationships and nurture old ones under the expectation that eating areas become comfortable and accessible locations for all members of the college community. This goal assumes that the renovated dining halls would offer more casual and less stressful eating situations than exist under the status quo.

The "Take Your Faculty/Staff to Lunch" program — with free meals as incentives — would be expanded and made more visible. By inviting members of the college currently rarely seen in the dining halls, we would encourage this interaction through allowances and incentives. Class schedules would be staggered around lunchtime to avoid the "Proctor Rush."

Much as students will not be required to eat in their particular Commons at every meal, we should not expect faculty and staff to discontinue use of the Crest Room and the Redfield Proctor room at lunch. After all, we recognize that students need lunch and dinner to catch up with friends and have casual conversation. Faculty and staff members need opportunities to meet with their colleagues for the same reasons.

IV. Continuing Membership

Since continuing membership is the issue over which most students seem divided, the Student Steering Committee chose to examine the issues of this cornerstone more closely than either decentralized dining or faculty proximity. We discussed the issues of duration of affiliation, student governance, and the flexibility to change commons.

Over the course of the past few months, no issue received more heated debate in our Committee than continuing membership. We have struggled with this issue, become frustrated with it, and come to agreements after considerable discussion. We recognize that the ideal system of residential life would encourage students to learn how to deal with roommates and suitemates. Further, the college must retain options wherever one lives. We have examined the needs of each class, first-year through senior, to determine what would make living within the Commons attractive to every Middlebury student.

Like the issue of dining, we make these recommendations under one precautionary assumption: **the continuing membership program cannot be fully instituted until all housing on campus is equalized.** Only upon this achievement can it be successfully implemented.

A. Principles and Philosophy

Our philosophy revolves around the expectation that students will want to continue residence in their Commons for all four years. Such a claim is hard to imagine on our mobile campus but would be necessary to the success of the proposal. We desire to create a system that encourages more interaction between classes while at the same time recognizing individual needs for first-years, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. We hope that Commons traditions will create another layer of attachment to the college. The Commons connection must be seamless and acceptable enough so that it can be almost taken for granted or pursued to the maximum level of involvement, depending upon the individual.

Most importantly, the residential system must support diversity for minority groups who may feel threatened by decentralization. Each Commons must provide a safe haven for those who feel isolated while fostering relationships between students with like and unlike beliefs and lifestyles.

We make the following recommendations with the following abstract principles in mind: inclusion, tolerance, support, community, connection, learning, understanding, communication, accountability, self governance, loyalty, and acceptance.

B. Defining Continuing Membership

All students will be randomly assigned to a Commons upon their matriculation at Middlebury.² Our goal is that students will want to maintain residency within the same Commons for all four years of their Middlebury career. We expect that the residential system would necessitate no requirements for residency and keep transience low. If the Commons system is built to encourage continuing residency, Middlebury will not have to establish mandates.

i. Room Changes and Inter-Commons Mobility

We recognize that the following circumstances would provide an opportunity to move outside of the Commons:

1. Social house residency at second semester of sophomore year
2. Language house residency at the beginning of third semester
3. Off-Campus residency
4. Completion of an application and subsequent interview by Residential Life Office during the academic year.

In the case of scenarios one through three, students will maintain their affiliation with their Commons. In scenario four, students requesting a room change in the event of roommate conflicts or other unforeseen circumstances would move within their Commons first, before moving between Commons later. In the event that a student desires to leave their Commons and join another, this decision would be reviewed by the Dean and Associate of each involved Commons.

ii. Room Draw

We propose a two-tiered room draw system to provide incentives for students to remain within their commons. The new system would base priority on Commons affiliation and class. All Commons members wishing to continue residency and membership the following year will choose rooms first in the priority of class. When this draw is completed, any non-Commons member wishing to draw into another Commons draws next. In the event of doubles or suites that have a majority of continuing candidates and a minority of non-members, they would be prioritized below an all-member suite and above a non-member suite.

iii. Affiliation of Social, Academic Interest, and Senior Houses

Social and academic interest houses will not be affiliated with individual Commons although they would be expected to co-sponsor events. Any Commons member could pledge or join any interest or social house, regardless of continuing membership.

Senior houses will be affiliated with individual Commons to ensure the possibility of continuing for four years, providing senior leadership, and offering incentives for

²As the Commons system matures, future discussions over 'legacy' Commons members may become pertinent. This would impact alumni giving to their Commons as well as a sense of ownership and tradition.

students to maintain affiliation.³ Each Commons will have an equal number of houses of a similar level of quality. Drawing into these houses will follow the same rules as the two-tiered room draw system. Thus, a group of five Brainerd seniors, who have lived together for four years, would have priority over a group of Cook seniors for an affiliated Brainerd house. Senior houses should request a budget from their Commons to plan events for the purpose of faculty/staff or interclass interaction.

Off campus housing will remain essentially the same as the status quo recognizing that some students need a "transitional" year of residency before moving into the working world.

iv. *Febs*

Currently, February first-years are placed wherever there is space. Nothing has been "set aside" for these students and they can live in a variety of situations: in a Battell double, Starr single, or Milliken suite. The new residential system must account for the arrival of a hundred first years by setting aside an equal number of beds in each Commons. Like September freshmen, Febs will be randomly and equally assigned to each Commons and live with the cluster of 100-120 freshmen.

v. *Students Returning from Abroad*

Similar to the Feb situation, juniors returning from a semester abroad are also placed into available space. In the new system, a number of rooms within each Commons would have to be set aside to allow continuing membership upon return. To ensure this, study abroad applications and commitments would be tabulated months earlier to anticipate the availability of rooms from first to second semester.

C. Proposals for Implementation: Infrastructure

i. *First-Year Housing*

In compliance with recommendations made over the 1996-97 academic year, first-years would be "clustered" together in groups of 100-120. They would live on all-first-year halls with a junior counselor(s) to assist their living and learning experience. First-year housing requires a large, central lounge (Allen/Pearsons) in which social and academic activities could occur. As much as possible, first-years should be housed in doubles with a small number of singles for unforeseen situations. Under no circumstances ought freshmen live in suites, as this limited interaction curtails the living experience of both the residents of the suite and residents of the first-year hall. The college should also retain its commitment to substance-free housing to any student who requests it.

The first-year experience requires the following aspects for success: JC program, First-year Seminars (for extra-Commons interaction), first-year roommates and halls, health and wellness programming, diversity training, opportunities for leadership and involvement, kitchens, large central lounges, small and quiet, 'tutoring' areas, and active/accessible Residence Hall Advisors.

ii. *Sophomore/Junior Housing*

Sophomores and juniors would have access to a variety of room sizes, from singles to suites. Both years, the relationship with the Associate and the Dean would be expanded in complement with a student's growing attachment to his/her department. The college must recognize that sophomores and juniors, in years of fragmentation after their first year, would benefit from being in proximity with other classmates. This would encourage class identity through class budgets and parties and prevent fragmentation and isolation.

³A minority opinion on the committee believed that senior houses were unnecessary, claiming that in an ideal situation of improved infrastructure and incentive, seniors ought to live closer to the rest of the Commons members.

iii. *Senior Housing*

We recognize that the variety of experiences each senior has over their four year Middlebury career leaves each individual in a unique place in terms of needs and expectations. While seniors ought to be encouraged to lead and interact with underclassmen, they also need more independence, autonomy, and isolation. This difficult balance, complicated by individual priorities, makes the issue of senior housing a complicated one.

Beyond senior houses and singles within Commons dorms, the college should commit to building a variety of senior suites and apartments as some may need seclusion and inclusion. If seniors live in apartments on the upper floors of a dormitory, it would be expected that security officers would grant more independence. Students of age should not be prohibited from drinking alcohol in public lounges or registering parties in their common spaces (within each apartment or suite). In short, senior apartments must allow a sense of ownership that equals that found in senior or off-campus houses.

Senior apartments would be comprised of three to six singles attached to a large common area with enough room for a dining table, couch, and lounge furniture. A full-size kitchen would also be provided so that seniors could cook and entertain for their friends. Along the lines of senior house funding, each Commons could offer a budget to each senior apartment for purposes of interclass interaction.

D. Proposals for Implementation: Student Governance

One of the strengths of residential systems at other colleges and universities is the strength of student responsibility via Student Self-Governance. In this peer-oriented system of discipline and government, less of an "administration versus students" mindset prevails. Instead, students gain a greater sense of accountability and responsibility for their actions and decisions. We recommend the following proposals of self-governance to pursue these principles in exchange for a level of respect from the administration that does not exist in the status quo situation. Since we are all adults, we must learn to act like adults. And when we begin acting like adults, we would expect Old Chapel and Security to treat us as such. The responsibility for creating this utopia lies first on the shoulders of the student body and foreshadows the appropriate reaction from the rest of the community.

i. *Student (Campus-wide) Government Structure*

The SGA General Assembly will be comprised of equal representation from each Commons (one representative per class in each Commons). Under six Commons, these twenty-four representatives would make decisions along the same line as the current General Assembly. The President and Vice-President would continue to be elected by the entire student body; Executive Committee would be appointed at the discretion of the President and Vice President.

Since Commons funding is to come from the administration, campus-wide student organizations and the student activities fund would continue to be handled by the SGA Finance Committee.

The Student Judicial Council (Supreme Court) would handle issues of discipline that are appealed by the Commons Judicial Council.

ii. *Commons Government Structure*

The Commons government structure would echo that of SGA. A Commons President and Vice President would be elected by the entire Commons and would appoint Committee chairs to the Commons Judicial Committee, Commons Finance Committee, and Commons Programming Board. These five individuals, along with the RHA, Dean, and Associate as non-voting members, would comprise the Commons Executive Committee. The Commons Judicial Committee would be a first line of discipline for issues like respect, vandalism, etc. It would be comprised of members appointed by the Commons Executive Committee and overseen by the Dean and Associate.

The Commons Finance Committee would budget money for events (social, cultural, and intellectual) upon request of the Commons Programming Board. Further, the Commons Finance Committee would oversee money spent on infrastructure improvements, repairs, and new facilities. Members would also be appointed by the Commons Executive Committee. This committee would advise facilities management and follow up on vandalism and dorm damage.

The Commons Programming Board's responsibility, in working with the Associate and Commons Secretary, is to plan a variety of events for Commons members. The chair of this committee would sit on MCAB⁴ to assist in planning campus-wide events as well.

V. Relationship of the House System

A. Social Houses

Excerpt from Appendix Two, Social Houses in the Enhanced Commons System:

"In the spirit of the proposal for the Enhanced Commons System, the social house membership and the Inter-House Council (IHC) hope to clarify and outline improvements to what the role of social houses should be in the Middlebury community. Both the Student Steering Subcommittee on Social Houses and the IHC support the following philosophical amendments and conceptual alterations to the existing system:

1. The social house system will work to complement the Commons
2. Social houses celebrate and fully endorse improving academic connections in the tradition of a true liberal arts education.
3. As members of the larger Middlebury Community, social houses recognize the significance of diversity.
4. The social houses recognize the fundamental importance of community service to student development and learning.
5. Inclusivity
6. The social houses dedicate themselves to offering Middlebury students a small-scale residential experience, for those looking to make additional connections.

B. Academic Interest Houses

The following recommendation is derived from a proposal drafted by the 1997-1998 AIHC. Academic Interest Houses would be completely separate from the Commons, but composed of residents who would maintain their Commons membership without mandated residency. No first-years would be allowed to live in the house and each individual could live there a maximum of two years.

AIHs would be encouraged to co-sponsor events with individual Commons and build a working relationship with each. However, affiliation would be discouraged to avoid creating Commons identities and allow students from all reaches of campus to explore a variety of cultural options.

Individual houses would remain decentralized and act as living/learning centers for students interested in the culture and language of a specific region. Resident Assistants and Teaching Assistants would continue to play a vital role in the programming and facilitation of each AIH. To balance the decentralization of the AIHs, a central multi-cultural language center should be incorporated into the new student center. Here language tables, labs, and learning stations could be visited on a daily basis and enjoy increased visibility. Likewise, the AIHC must remain central to ensure consistency and allow interaction and co-sponsorship between AIHs.

⁴Since student organizations MUST remain centralized to encourage cross-Commons interaction, we refer to the Student Affairs Proposal and its description of the "vibrant downtown" and "role of student organizations."

VI. The Student Union

One of the most critical parts of a Commons system as we have proposed would be a gathering place for students from all Commons. Throughout our discussions with students, the "Proctor Experience" was cited as a positive on campus for the interaction it allows. Students from all over campus eat and socialize together, allowing friends from different dorms, academic departments, extracurricular activities, and backgrounds to meet and interact. This is critical for Middlebury's student body, because in a decentralized Commons system there is a fear that all contact with students from other Commons would be cut off.

The new Student Union would serve as a gathering space, both formally and informally. For this to be effective, all mail facilities should be in the Union as well as the Student Activities and Student Employment Offices. Most student organizations would also have their offices in the Union, making it a place of daily and lively interaction. It must include several conference rooms, a large lecture hall, and ample office space. This provides all organizations with a centralized home through which there would arise increased opportunities for inter-club communication and better co-sponsorship opportunities.

The most critical parts of the Union are the social spaces in which faculty, staff, and students can convene. General lounges, in addition to the Grille and Crest Room, would work for such interaction. These would be open and spacious naturally-lit areas in which community members could work, relax, and socialize. By creating these spaces as a place where students feel comfortable, there are increased chances for the formation of inter-Commons friendships and acquaintances.

The philosophy behind the Union is to "unite" students and offer opportunities for large-scale social interaction.

VII. Conclusion

As students bound by the contextual impression of the status quo, the Student Steering Committee echoes a variety of fears held by today's community. On the other hand, as students who recognize the constantly changing dynamic of Middlebury College from decade to decade, we hope that the new residential system will usher in a new level of excitement. In conclusion, we offer our fears and hopes in light of the proposal.

A. Fears

i. Ultra-Decentralization

Students choose Middlebury because of its intimate environment and small size. We fear that the residential proposal may stratify a campus that already boasts a great deal of natural community. If a student lives in the same geographic area for all four years, how will that change their perception of Middlebury? How can students interact with other students who do not share membership in the same Commons? How will campus-wide organizations survive — as they must — in the context of a separated community? Balancing the level of local community while possibly compromising the college-wide community will be a difficult issue facing future generations of Middlebury students.

ii. Funding and Administrative Commitment

The Commons proposal can only work with the following assumptions: equalized amenities and infrastructure and financial commitment from Old Chapel. **This is not a situation where the college can only go halfway.** Money is a critical issue. If continuing membership is to work, equalized housing must already be in place. If decentralized dining is to work, we cannot compromise the high standards of MiddDining in the interest of funding. Faculty proximity requires the commitment of a group of professors that seem to us only lukewarmly supportive of the proposal. Students respect and revere faculty members and will follow vocal support from our professors. Thusfar, faculty have been as reactionary as the student body.

The pivotal structural improvement in ensuring success is the presence of a Student Center to offer the "downtown" experience so vital to the Middlebury lifestyle. Without these factors working together, we fear the impossibility of creating a successful Commons system.

iii. *Transition: Growing Pains*

If the proposal goes underway, we fear the situation faced by future generations of Middlebury students and the vast construction and imposition that may occur some years down the line. Such confusion may deter prospective students from matriculating at Middlebury, compromising our high standards of excellence. Likewise, student backlash is likely to be considerable and we recommend that every decision made in the implementation stage be visible to every member of the student body.

iv. *Losing Middlebury*

Students stay at Middlebury because they love the experience of attending this institution. We thrive in a combination of social and intellectual interaction. We fear that too much intellectualism, as some faculty seem to desire, would compromise the social growth of Middlebury students. Our love of Middlebury College makes it exceedingly difficult to envision change and much easier to react to altering the face of our institution. We fear the Commons system as a recipe to expand the size of the student body. We do not wish to replicate Rice, Yale, Colby, Princeton, or Harvard because they are decidedly un-Middlebury in their unique environments. We fear losing the Middlebury to which we came and to which other students like us will come for generations.

B. Hopes

i. *Fostering a Community of Respect*

The Student Steering Committee hopes to create an environment in which priority is placed on a level of mutual respect that is not currently seen in the status quo. By increasing community visibility, committing to a stringent self-governance program, and pursuing accountability through student ownership of residence halls, the Commons system could find the delicate balance it needs to succeed. To be treated like adults, we must start acting like adults and take pride in the place we attend.

ii. *Discovering Tradition*

In an institution nearing its bicentennial, the lack of tradition at Middlebury is concerning. With the advent of the Commons system, we hope that situations would arise through which new traditions could be created for the benefit of future generations. As alumni, we hope to remember Middlebury not just for the people, but for the uniqueness of the place as well.

iii. *Finding Middlebury*

We hope that the successful institution of the Commons system will make residential life a true "peak" of Middlebury College. We hope the system attracts students to choose Middlebury over comparable colleges for its strength of community and interactive environment. In an ideal situation, residential life would foster and nurture the social and intellectual lifestyle that already exists for the typical student. With the proper forethought and a little luck, Middlebury will evolve while remaining unchanged for the next two hundred years.

Respectfully Submitted,
The Student Steering Committee, 1997-98
15 April 1998

APPENDIX ONE. Problems and Solutions: Improving the Status Quo

Our interaction with countless student groups has revealed the greater problems of Middlebury College. Recognizing the substantial student opposition to the proposed Enhanced Residential System, the Student Steering Committee brainstormed a list of status quo problems and possible solutions. These recommendations do not require the presence of a Commons System, although they might be included in the vision. Whether in years of transition between today's residential system and tomorrow's, or in a Middlebury climate that eschews the vision altogether, we feel that these problems and scenarios must be addressed and improved.

I. Faculty/Staff/Student Interaction

- "Take Your Student to Lunch" Program
- Book Club Program in which faculty and staff teach and discuss favorites in informal environments.
- Film Series and Discussion Groups
- Building lounges and study areas (like the Psych Suite) for each academic department (History/English/Political Science) within academic buildings. Each space would take its own character and identity and faculty would be encouraged to spend casual time (e.g. reading newspaper) in the lounge area.
- Assign a dean to each incoming first-year upon matriculation (i.e. a letter of congratulations from deans).
- Encourage faculty/staff/student intramural teams.
- Implement the Agreement to Respect Community
- Residence hall-based judicial groups to deal with minor infractions (noise complaints, fire extinguisher deployments, dorm damage). Include on the judicial group all members of the community with students at the core. The inclusion of faculty and custodial staff on the jury would enhance the preservation of a respectful community.
- Increased diversity training for Res Life staff
- Minority Affairs Advisors (student volunteers)
- Bi-weekly dorm meetings with Facilities Management and Dean of Students.
- Dorm damage posters with detailed description.
- Revitalize Student Activities Fair. Two nights, longer hours, better follow-up by organization leaders.

II. Disrespecting Community

III. Student Involvement

IV. Housing Issues/Equalization

- Open houses (and increased budgets) for living/learning centers, social, and academic interest houses during first-year orientation. Junior counselors could lead a tour of the facilities and each house would entertain students on 'scavenger hunt.'

- Middlebury must commit the resources to get equalization underway.

- Middlebury must create housing that offers a legitimate reason for seniors to stay on campus.

- First-year: Double rooms, no suites. Large, central lounges complemented by small, quiet study areas. Larger budgets for Lifestyles events. Central kitchens and ovens in dorms.

- Febs: Avoid isolating Febs within upper-class dorms and attempt to house them (with a JC) in a cluster of rooms formerly occupied by students leaving for abroad during the spring.

- Sophomore: Single rooms of high quality. Known place of residency before leaving in the spring of their first year. This can be ensured by requiring earlier notification and commitment by those students traveling to and returning from abroad.

- Junior: Suites (ability to live with friends), e-mail access to room draw system, social house/academic interest house residence, encouragement to be Junior Counselors.

- Senior: Own space/autonomy. More senior apartments and houses with a kitchen, large lounge (within which kegs may be registered), singles connected to common space, senior rebates for dining plans, budgets for senior houses.

V. Growth of the College

- Middlebury must not allow more than 2350 students to live on campus.

VI. Dining

- Change the class schedule to avoid the 12:15 rush
- Keep dining hall open late in afternoon and evening

- Pursue a meal plan/reimbursement/debit card system to be used in Crest Room and Grille

VII. Alcohol Policy

- Reevaluate citation policy to improve student perception by valuing safety over punishment.

- Allow students of age to register parties to their own apartments and suites.

APPENDIX TWO. Social Houses in the Enhanced Commons System (ECS) (A Report by the Student Steering Committee Subcommittee on Social Houses)

In the spirit of the proposal for the Enhanced Commons System (ECS), the social house membership and the Inter-House Council (IHC) hope to clarify and outline improvements to what the role of social houses should be in the Middlebury community. Both the Student Steering Subcommittee on Social Houses and the IHC support the following philosophical amendments and conceptual alterations to the existing system.

1. The social house system will work to complement the Enhanced Commons System.

- Become centers for inter-Commons relationship development where members of different Commons are able to form connections through their social house.
- Encourage students to become involved with or to spend more time in different Commons.
- Contribute to the sense of a larger Middlebury "community" through inter-Commons student interaction.
- Provide alternative venues for campus events, serving as "function halls" available to different student groups and Commons' planning boards.
- Offer attractive housing options for upper class students. By increasing campus retention, social houses will help keep students on campus, involved in campus-life, and furthering their Commons connections.
- Structure: Social house members will maintain original commons affiliation even after joining a social house. Commons allegiance will not be changed by social house membership, and the individual social houses will exist organizations separate from specific Commons.

2. Social Houses celebrate and fully endorse improving academic connections in the tradition of a true liberal arts education.

- Commit to fostering academic achievement and supporting learning both inside and outside of the classroom. Pursue educational goals through scholarship opportunities, faculty lecture series, and literary competitions for example.
- Serve as small learning communities to bridge the gap between academic departments, the learning that takes place in the classroom, and student residential life.
- Facilitate closer and more honest connections with academic departments and faculty mentors through informal dinners, lectures, and faculty advisors to the houses.
- Teach interpersonal skills, and provide leadership experiences through house government, responsibility through , and accountability.
- Enable the social responsibility of social house members, demanding respect for people and property in the Middlebury Community.
- Structure: Faculty tutors or relationships with members of the Academic Support Office as mentors to social house communities. Opportunities for peer education within the social houses. Select an academic "Safe Person," (not the President, Vice-president, or Pledge-chair), to work as an academic advisor, supporting candidates' studies throughout educational process.

3. As members of the larger Middlebury Community, Social Houses recognize the significance of diversity.

- Institutionalize tolerance, understanding, a support for diversity, a theme of acceptance, and a recognition of students' diverse social needs.
- Facilitate community-building activities through co-sponsorship with special-interest groups.
- Improve community awareness through education about issues of racism, harassment, and diversity.

- Take a positive stand on issues of diversity within the Middlebury community.
- Structure: House members regularly attend planning meetings of the Commons, the ISO, MCAB, etc. Work directly with the Human Relations Committee.

4. The Social Houses recognize the fundamental importance of community service to student development and learning.

- Incorporate community service within the mission statements of each social house and the IHC.
- Designate social house involvement to signify member interest in, and support for, the IHC community service initiative.
- Implement community service requirements during candidate education and for each member.
- Utilize the IHC to organize campus-wide community service events (i.e. Habitat for Humanity Charity Ball, Percy Hill Benefit Concert for Addison County Community Action Group).
- Further academic learning outside of the classroom as well as foster connection between college students and town residents through community service.

5. Inclusivity.

- Offer events to which all members of the Middlebury community are invited.
- Maintain a way for campus-wide interaction to take place, offering a "down-town experience" for all students to reconnect with each other.
- Help to form bonds of friendship between students from different backgrounds, and bring together a campus separated into Commons.
- Operate in a cooperative and complementary relationship with the inclusive Commons.
- Redefine remaining stereotypical associations to the Greek fraternity-based social system in the Middlebury College Social House system.
- Structure the membership process so as to assure an appropriate introduction to Middlebury's unique social house system. The goals of the membership processes are:
 - 1) to teach inter-personal skills
 - 2) to encourage candidate self-discovery
 - 3) to learn about group dynamics
 - 4) to raise awareness about community issues
 - 5) to offer conflict-resolution strategies
 - 6) to create peer-mentor relationships between different classes
 - 7) to encourage group responsibility through self-governance and personal accountability.

Continue the education process as way to keep the size of house memberships small enough to allow small, closely-knit communities to form.

6. The Social Houses dedicate themselves to offering Middlebury students a small-scale residential experience, for those looking to make additional connections.

- Offer Middlebury students the opportunity to experience a close, familial community characterized by companionship, support, camaraderie, and meaningful relationships.
- Create links between these disparate Commons communities.
- Build connections among social house community members to help perpetuate community values of respect, accountability, and tolerance.
- Infuse these values into the larger college community as the social house experience allows members to look beyond their own experiences to the extended college community.

7. Offer Socially Stimulating Activities.

- Encourage students to gather and participate in numerous events, many of which do not involve alcohol. Current social house examples include: intramural athletics, community service, movie screenings, faculty dinners, coffee houses, and performance opportunities for student musicians and bands.
- Provide a social outlet for students, contributing to the development of the mind outside of the classroom.
- Promote responsible social activity on campus to limit high-risk behavior off campus.
- Contribute to school spirit through membership support.
- Supplement the quality and variety of events taking place on campus through co-sponsorship.
- Structure: Continue to offer campus-wide events which utilize social houses' visibility and membership support to attract attention to certain causes or events. Engage difficult issues such as the campus alcohol policy, issues of diversity, or sexual assault.
 - 1) Require "TIPS" (responsible bar-tending training) for pledge classes beginning in fall 1998, in an effort to curb underage and binge drinking.
 - 2) Organize peer discussion groups in freshmen dorms for conversations about the role of alcohol in the Middlebury community.
 - 3) Encourage female members to participate in Rape Aggression Defense Training (RAD).

Principle 1
An Integrated Residential System

Principle: An Enhanced Commons system, founded on inclusiveness, and devoted to integrating educational activity and mature community living, should be the central element of Middlebury's entire residential program. An integrated, Commons-focused plan will replace the current four-part system of Commons, academic interest houses, social houses, and block-draw houses. Achieving fundamental goals of extending the life of the mind and creating a more humane and considerate campus atmosphere require that residential units have inclusive membership practices and a primary educational focus. All residential units will relate specifically and constructively to the Commons. The needs of the Commons shall determine the disposition of all residential space, including the new Ridgeline Woods housing.

Proposal 1: Each residential unit will belong to a Commons. Residential academic interest houses can serve as a natural link to the classroom experience. Other student groups occupying a residential building will have admission policies and procedures consistent with those Handbook rules governing academic interest houses.

Proposal 2: All students will be members of a Commons throughout their college careers. Assigned a Commons on the basis of their first-year seminar, they will normally continue residence there for a second year, though sophomores may apply to live in an academic interest house. There should be clear incentives to keep juniors and seniors actively involved in their Commons.

Principle 2
Faculty Leadership in the Commons

Principle: Because the purpose of the enhanced Commons system is to improve the intellectual atmosphere of the residential life in the College, faculty participation and leadership are essential.

Proposal: Commons Associates will normally be tenured members of the faculty. Compensation for their work will include a course reduction, a substantial programming budget, and subsidized housing. In some cases, it may be possible to provide residential space for Associates relatively near the Commons. However because of construction costs and architectural concerns, and in order to preserve the spaciousness of the campus landscape, proximate residence should not be a requirement for Commons Associates. In all cases, Commons Associates should have control over a relatively large social space in the Commons.

Principle 3
Facilities Planning

Principle: Facilities planning should increase opportunities for interaction between faculty and students in contexts that foster intellectual discussion and serious dialogue. However, this goal needs to be pursued with two complementary concerns in mind. The first of these is that improvement of student residential life should not come at the cost of threatening the quality of our academic programs. The second is that, even as the improved Commons promote a richer, more intimate setting for interaction among students, faculty, and staff, the goals of unity and diversity must continue to be pursued as well. These latter two goals are, themselves, complementary. Campus life should foster diversity in the student body, the construction of positive self-images among minorities, and constructive relationships among different groups.

Proposal 1: Residential units should include classrooms, study spaces, faculty offices, and other rooms for conferences between faculty and students.

Proposal 2: Overall goals of maintaining the student-faculty ratio and average class size should not be sacrificed in the process of enhancing dormitory amenities.

Proposal 3: A first-rate Student Center will be constructed as a place for congregation by the entire community.

Proposal 4: As in the original Commons proposal, residential academic interest houses (including language houses) will be encouraged within the commons system after a student's first year. While these houses will be attached to a Commons, no student shall be barred from living in a residential academic interest house because of membership in another Commons.

Proposal 5: Non-residential spaces will be developed to provide opportunities for students with similar interests to gather.

Principle 4
Decentralized Dining

Principle: Decentralized dining will be an important element of an enhanced residential system, and should provide regular and convenient opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to eat together. It should also make it easier to recognize the special eating requirements and needs of certain Middlebury students.

Proposal 1: Faculty or staff associated with a Commons should be invited, and subsidized, to eat meals with students in a variety of venues, including in the faculty or staff member's home.

Proposal 2: The dining plan should offer a range of choices to students, in order to foster healthy eating habits. Since the current large, centralized facility at Proctor seems to pose a serious problem for many students with eating disorders, the new dining system should take this problem explicitly into account.

Principle 5

Principle: Residential life should foster responsibility and accountability in student activities.

The language division would like to contribute to the discussion of the enhanced commons system with some suggestions on the preservation and enhancement of the academic interest houses. As the Academic Interest House Council has stated, the houses have already achieved many of the goals to which the new commons system aspires, and we believe that integrating them into the new model for residential life will be beneficial to the individual houses and their constituencies and to the commons system at large.

The Academic Interest House Council has proposed three models for house involvement. The first would affiliate each house with a different commons, the second would join all the academic interest houses into a single commons, and the third would not establish a relationship between the houses and the commons system: residents would maintain their allegiance to their original commons. We support the first model and would like to expand on it with some general suggestions on the assignment of students to a particular commons and on the structure of faculty involvement in the system.

Affiliating each language house with a particular commons would achieve a natural affiliation of each language department with one commons. Departmental events could be scheduled both there and at the language house and would contribute to the formation of a given commons identity. This identity will in turn help give definition and focus to each commons as a place of academic as well as social life. The dining hall of the commons affiliated with the Italian House, for instance, could offer regularly scheduled dinners that reflect the language's culture. First-year students will live in the commons; sophomores, juniors, and seniors should all be eligible for residence in the language house. The immersion experience is

excellent preparation for sophomores going abroad the following year, while returning seniors are invaluable mentors to the sophomores and juniors preparing to go. Since seniors will not be required to live in the commons, the language house option may induce them to maintain a connection to the commons affiliated with the house.

Departmental and faculty involvement of the kind anticipated by the language division could be extended to other disciplines by the linkage of first-year seminars to a particular commons. All of the first-year seminars taught by the members of a given department can be tied to the same commons. These courses should be taught on-site in the commons classroom spaces. This linkage could mean, for instance, that Chinese, East Asian Studies, History, and so on would all be affiliated with one commons, which would promote interdisciplinarity in the scheduling of events there. The contacts that lead to that sort of scheduling will themselves be facilitated by locating temporary office space in the commons for those who are teaching a first-year seminar that year. (These members of the faculty would retain their original offices, but would hold office hours in the temporary commons space, further emphasizing the connection between residential life and academics and providing more opportunities for student-faculty contact outside the classroom.) One might assume student interest in such events, since incoming students have already made the choice of a first-year seminar based on the subject matter; first-year seminars often reflect at least part of the faculty member's disciplinary interests. Living and working in close proximity to other students (from all four classes) and faculty who share at least one of their intellectual interests would shape positively a first-year student's academic experience of Middlebury from the beginning, setting the tone for the rest of their

college years in a way that life in Battell and Stewart as now constituted may not. Senior affiliation with the commons should be promoted as well: International Studies senior "capstone" courses should also be taught in the commons classroom spaces. A general commitment to locating multi-use spaces in the commons that could be used, for instance, as classrooms, cafes, theaters, and video screening sites for first-year seminars and capstone courses would further underscore the fluidity of the boundaries between residential and academic life at Middlebury. The fact that virtually every member of every department on campus teaches a first-year seminar at some point means that this structural model would permit universal faculty involvement on at least some level in the new commons system and that students would form relationships with many of the members of a number of different departments that happen to be affiliated with their commons.

Event scheduling and/or co-sponsoring may of course happen independently of the several departments in a given commons, which means that students will continue to encounter faculty from other disciplines. The identification with a commons, however, may ensure higher turnout at such events. As a result of relationships and interests nurtured at their own commons, students who live in the commons affiliated with, for instance, East Asian Studies may follow a talk that it has co-sponsored with Political Science over to the commons with which the latter is affiliated. Through that experience s/he will discover other, linked interests.

Students' interests vary and evolve, however: students who are assigned to a given commons on the basis of a first-year seminar taught by a member of the History Department may, for instance, want to major in

Spanish, spend a year in Madrid, and live in the Spanish House. These students may well opt to change their commons affiliation in the second year in order to concentrate on this particular academic interest. Commons membership should be flexible when it promotes the student's intellectual development, as should the option for living in one of the academic interest houses. Students who have already formed close relationships with the members of a residential community can bring other members of that community into house events; members of the house will also have much to offer to the commons from which they came or with which they are now affiliated.

MEMO TO: Kathy Ebner and Tim Spears

FROM: Commons Associates (Kirsten Powell, Karl Lindholm, Brett Millier, Martin Beatty, Cynthia Atherton, and Susan Stockton)

RE: Proximate housing for Associates

DATE: 15 April 1998

At a recent meeting of the current Commons Associates, the following opinion statement was agreed to and is submitted for consideration in the on-going discussions about the 'enhanced' Commons system.

"The current Commons Associates are in unanimous agreement that proximate housing for the Associate is a positive component and should be included in the 'enhanced Commons' proposal. Easy access to the Associates' houses for events and a sense of direct involvement in the life of the campus for the Associate is an important factor in the success of the goals of the Commons system. We are defining proximate housing as that which is within view of and an easy walk to the residential unit.

A current example is 7 Franklin Street (Wonnacott Commons). Further examples of where this could happen are Blinn Lane (Ross Commons), tennis court area (Brainerd Commons) etc. We feel that this solution answers the need for Associate housing that is within easy distance to the residence halls but that it also provides flexibility for the system. Should the Commons climate change with a decision to include the Associate housing adjacent or contiguous to residential units, the 'proximate houses' could be put into the faculty rental pool."